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# YOUNG EARNEST

THE ROMANCE OF A  
BAD START IN LIFE

BY

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*Now my question is: have you a scheme of life  
consonant with the spirit of modern philosophy  
—with the views of intelligent, moral, humane  
human beings of this period?*

THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY RICHMOND.

To  
O. M.

*Words skilled and woven do not make a book  
Except some truth in beauty shine in it.  
I bring you this because you overlook  
My faults to follow out my probing wit.  
And where it fails or falls short of its aim,  
You see design and waste nor praise nor blame  
On the achievement. Stirring to the will,  
Your wit still urges mine to greater skill.*





# CONTENTS

## BOOK ONE LINDA BROCK

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. LOVE IN EARNEST . . . . .	3
II. 166 HOG LANE WEST . . . . .	13
III. GEORGE MARRIED . . . . .	29
IV. A RETURN . . . . .	41
V. SETTLING DOWN . . . . .	51
VI. PROFESSOR SMALLMAN . . . . .	60
VII. FLYING NEAR THE CANDLE . . . . .	71
VIII. INTIMACY . . . . .	85
IX. PATERFAMILIAS . . . . .	98
X. HONEYMOON . . . . .	109
XI. MATRIMONY . . . . .	130
XII. ESCAPE . . . . .	147

## BOOK TWO ANN PIDDUCK

I. ADVENTURE IN LONDON . . . . .	157
II. MITCHAM MEWS . . . . .	169
III. MR. MARTIN . . . . .	182
IV. LEARNING A TRADE . . . . .	196
V. TOGETHER . . . . .	206
VI. KILNER . . . . .	219
VII. OLD LUNT . . . . .	226

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
VIII. RITA AND JOE . . . . .	236
IX. TALK . . . . .	254
X. AN ENCOUNTER . . . . .	270
XI. VISION . . . . .	277
XII. SETTLEMENT . . . . .	285

## BOOK THREE

### CATHLEEN BENTLEY

I. MEETING . . . . .	301
II. HAPPINESS . . . . .	311
III. THE WEST WIND . . . . .	322
IV. EXPLANATION . . . . .	331
V. THRIGSBY . . . . .	343
VI. THE COMFORT OF RELIGION . . . . .	362
VII. CASEY'S VENTURE . . . . .	370
VIII. THRIVING . . . . .	382
IX. YOUNG LOVE DREAMING . . . . .	388



BOOK ONE

LINDA BROCK

Ha! Ha!

*So* you take human nature upon trust?

# I

## LOVE IN EARNEST

O that joy so soon should waste  
Or so sweet a bliss  
As a kiss  
Might not forever last!

**I**T annoyed the young man that at such a time, in such a place, he should be thinking of his father. Waiting for his beloved, he desired to have no thought but for her; most loyal intention sadly unfulfilled, for he could think only of his father, first as a wondrous being who could skillfully become at will an elephant or a zebra, or more tranquilly fascinate and absorb by wagging his ears with no disturbance of his face. The young man, John René Fourmy, could more clearly remember his father's ears than his features. He was introspective enough to know that his tenderness for the young woman, his melting anticipation of her coming, had led him back to the first adoration of his life, and from that to the tragedy of its obliteration.

Came the distressing recollection of his father's downfall, devastating for the boy of three who had witnessed it. He could visualize it clearly, so sharp had been the cruel impression, the indignity of it. The bedroom in the little house in the country where they



## YOUNG EARNEST

had lived near Billy Lummas and Sam Ardwick, who had fits in the road. A room full of bed. In that bed his father and himself eager for the moment when his father should arise from his bed and fill the world, and his mother apparently just as eager because she was entreating and imploring. Only the more did his father wrap himself in the bedclothes. These suddenly were torn down amid peals of laughter; a fond scuffle, though the boy perceived not the fondness; up went his father's nightshirt, his long body was turned over and it was slapped resoundingly on that place considerably designed by nature to receive such onslaughts. The slapping was done with the back of a hairbrush, an instrument that, in alternation with a slipper, was used upon himself. That a man, that a glorious father should suffer, and, because he suffered, deserve such an indignity, was too much. A shadow came over the world, and René remembered flinging himself down by the bed and shedding passionate tears for the departed glory. Thereafter his father was no wonder to him, he too was subject to the authority of his mother, and became henceforth only a tyrannous buffoon, nervously kind or noisily angry.

Then René remembered the return from the country to a succession of houses in streets; his father just risen from his bed as he came home to dinner at midday; bottles of whisky and boxes of cigarettes. And when at school they asked him what his father was, he used to reply, "A gentleman. And he went to a public school," that being the formula which had been given to him to account for existence and

## LOVE IN EARNEST

all its puzzlements. Public school and heaven were for a long time confounded in his mind, and the formula had accounted adequately for his father's Elijah-like disappearance from the scene when René was ten.

That was all he knew, and there was the sting of injustice in this present intrusion in the Scottish glen, hallowed by the delights of a young love which boy and girl had arranged should shake the world into a wonder at its glory. A sordid family history was a clog upon romance, and our young man was that earnest creature, a romantic.

A stolen love, for she lived at the great house taken by her father for the sport of the autumn months, and he was staying with his great-aunt Janet, an ex-governess, in the village, as he had done ever since he was eleven, for his holidays.

Now he was nearly twenty, wonderfully in love, punctual to his appointment, striving for romantic thoughts and able to achieve nothing but these humiliating memories of his father. He tried singing; that was of no avail. It did but call to mind his father's songs. He threw pebbles into the burn, but they gave him no amusement. Then from his pocket he drew an anthology of love—poems from which he had been accustomed to read to his fair—and so he lulled himself to something near the warm mood of expectancy and began to tell himself that she was very late, that she had failed him on this their last day. There was a sort of sweet anguish in the disappointment which he liked so much that he was almost put out when she came.

## YOUNG EARNEST

He leaped to his feet and opened his arms and she sank into them, and an enchantment descended upon them and they kissed.

He had prepared for her a couch of bracken. On this they lay and kissed again. This kiss was tragic. The enchantment broke in the middle, and he found the proximity of her face ridiculous and embarrassing and his position uncomfortable. He did not tell her so, and a simulated rapture hid his feelings from her. She sighed:

"Oh, René!"

The sound of his name on her lips never failed to move him, and a little of the enchantment returned. He could endure her nearness, and gave her an affectionate little hug quite genuinely warm. It surprised her into happy laughter.

"Oh, René! it has been more beautiful this year even than last. Of course we're older. Do you think it goes on for ever and ever, year after year, growing more and more beautiful?"

"Very few lovers——" began René in a solemn voice, but at once the generalization offended him and he never reached his predicate. The subject seemed entirely to satisfy Cathleen. She took his hand in hers:

"We mustn't stop writing to each other again."

"It was you who stopped."

"I thought——"

"It made it very horrid meeting you again, very anxious, I mean—I mean I don't know what your life is like."



## LOVE IN EARNEST

"You know I shall never find anyone like you, René, never."

He thought with distaste of her brothers, robust, athletic young men, wonderfully tailored, with a knack of getting the last ounce of effect out of soap and water. Dirt avoided them; they could not be shabby or untidy, and they made him feel grubby and shrunken. Oxford and Cambridge they were, and they stared him into a sort of silly shame when he spoke of his university, Thrigsby, and yet, through his shame there would dart tremors of a fierce feeling of moral superiority. Anyhow, their sister loved him, and never "chipped" him as their young women "chipped" them. There was never any sign that their young women took them seriously.

"I will write," said Cathleen. "This year won't seem so long. I couldn't be certain, last year."

"Are you certain now?"

"Oh, René!"

This time the enchantment was full on them, raced through them, alarmed them. They moved a little apart.

"Let's talk sense," said he. "I want to marry you."

"Oh, yes."

"They won't let me, you know. I've got my own way to make. In three years you'll be twenty-one. I shall probably have to stay in Thrigsby because I can make a living there, but I'll get to London as soon as I can. You wouldn't like Thrigsby."

"Anywhere with you."

"The people there aren't your sort. My own peo-

## YOUNG EARNEST

ple won't like my marrying so young. I've got rotten uncles and aunts backing me because they think I'm clever. I should have been in business long ago if it hadn't been for them. My brother's in a shipping office——"

"What did your father do?"

He shifted uneasily on that. The formula seemed empty and a little vulgar, somehow grimy, to present to her. He answered:

"He drank whisky and smoked cigarettes."

"Oh! I'm sorry."

Almost imperceptibly she shrank away from him, but he saw it.

"You may as well know. We're no great shakes. My old Aunt Janet talks of the great people she has known, but my mother's just a Thrigsby 'widow' living in a thirty-pound-a-year house in an ex-genteel part of the town. There are lots of women like her in Thrigsby. You live in one of those streets and nothing seems to happen. Then you hear that the lady at No. 53 isn't married to her husband, or that Mr. Twemlow of 25 has run away from his wife and four children. We lived at 49 Axon Street when my father disappeared. We live at 166 Hog Lane West now. We've gone up in the world since my brother began to earn money."

He had talked himself into a gloom. The smoke of Thrigsby seemed to smirch the glade.

"Poor old thing!" said Cathleen. "I don't see that it matters much. You're you, just the same. We live in a house called Roseneath. It's in Putney, but

## LOVE IN EARNEST

we call it London. Father makes a lot of money, and is a recorder and all the rest of it, but we aren't anything in particular. We turn up our noses at a lot of people, but there are lots more people who turn up their noses at us. You'd laugh if you could see how savage it makes Edith and Rachel sometimes when they grovel for invitations and don't get them. And it was wonderful what a difference it made when Basil got his blue at Cambridge. All Putney——"

She threw out her hands to indicate the extent of her brother's triumph. Then, realizing how far their talk had taken them from the sweet employment which was their habit, she crept nearer.

"If I thought all that nonsense was going to upset you, and hang about you while we're waiting, I'd run away with you to-morrow."

"Oh, my darling!" cried he, overcome by this recklessness and proof of the seriousness of her intentions. They sat with hands clasped, gazing into each other's eyes in a charmed happiness.

"Forever and ever," said René.

"Forever and ever," cried she. "It isn't many people who find the real thing in the first."

He glowed.

"Oh! we must never spoil it."

Then they lay side by side with the volume of love poems between them, and he read aloud their favorites.

They became very sorrowful as they realized that the last moments of their golden days were running out, and they held each other close in a long shy

## YOUNG EARNEST

embrace, and they kissed each other fearfully, and Cathleen could not keep back her tears.

"You will write to me?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Good-by, my dear, good-by."

So reluctantly, with dragging steps, they walked out of their glade and into the path leading to the great house. At the last turn they embraced again, and parted quickly on a sudden crackling in the woods. They saw nothing, but they walked on more swiftly, in a silence more full of fear than of love.

At the garden gate they were met by Mr. Bentley, Cathleen's father. To René he loomed very large, and he felt a sickening internal disturbance as he saw that his presence was ignored.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," said Mr. Bentley.

"I've been a walk."

"Your mother wants you."

"At once?"

"She wanted you an hour ago."

Cathleen sped away.

Disconcertingly René knew that her father's whole attention was concentrated upon him, though the lawyer's little cunning eyes were not looking at him. They both stood still, with the silence between them growing colder and colder. René hotly imagined himself saying:

"Sir, I love your daughter and she loves me. I am poor but able. I have won many prizes at school, and in the Faculty of Economics and Commercial Science



## LOVE IN EARNEST

in the University of Thrigsby. I am young, sir, but——”

When at last he opened his lips he said:

“We—we’ve been a walk.”

“So I perceive.”

“The woods are very beautiful at this time of year.”

The silence froze.

“Are you staying long?” This came at length in a snappy, cross-examining voice.

“I go to-morrow.”

René was overwhelmed with the grubby shrunk feeling. It seemed so easy for these people to mount the high horse of their social superiority.

“Will you kindly tell your aunt that we are expecting her to dinner the day after to-morrow?”

With that Mr. Bentley rolled in at the garden gate (he was a fat little man) and closed it, though he knew that René’s way lay through the garden.

Raging, the young man walked the necessitated extra mile, infuriated and chilled by two questions: Had Cathleen removed the bracken from her hair? and Was that meeting by the gate accident or design?

That night he asked his Aunt Janet about his father. She dodged his inquiries, and he could get nothing from her but this:

“I admire your mother more than I can say. She married a bad Fourmy, and that’s as bad as you can get. Poor, too. I was glad when that little money came to her.”

He gave her Mr. Bentley’s message, and she said:

## YOUNG EARNEST

"You mustn't let their way of living go upsetting you. It's just money. You've got to fill the gap between you with more than that."

"With what?"

"You'll find that out."

Did she know of his love? Was she warning him? Did she approve? Did she think him worthy? How could people survive love and become old and dull? All these and more questions buzzed about him as he lay in bed. He brushed them all aside with the cry, "Oh, but I love her!" And, being young and full of health, he was soon asleep, though a blank tossing night would have more pleased him and his mood.

## II

### 166 HOG LANE WEST

The homeward journey was by no means so agreeable.

EVERY year since he had been a small boy, as the carriage rounded the crag which blots the lake out of sight, René had been moved to tears. Happiness and brightness were left behind, and every moment brought him nearer to dullness and dark streets and uncomprehending minds. And now, as he rounded the crag, Cathleen appeared on the summit, just too late to meet him or to come within earshot. She was wearing a blue sunbonnet, and she snatched it from her head and waved it until he was out of sight. He turned and watched her and tears came, and he could hardly choke back his sobs, and hoped miserably that the driver of his fly was not aware of his unmanliness.

In the train he tried to tell himself that he was taking back the brightness of his love to Thrigsby, but as he came nearer, more and more powerfully did it seem to reach out to crush his love. By the time he was out in the Albert Station, he had reached a depression not to be broken even by the excitement of seeing again the familiar sights, the trams, the black

## YOUNG EARNEST

river, the Collegiate Church, the dark warehouses, the school where he had spent so many dazed, busy, monotonous years, the statue of the Prince Consort, the yellow timber-yards by the canal, the brilliant green-grocer's shop at the corner of Kite Street, the council school where he had begun his education, the dirty brick streets among which his whole youth had been spent. Only some horrid disaster could have relieved him. Even up to the moment when the door opened he hoped almost desperately to find some difference in his home.

The erratic servant came to the door. She had a black smudge across her cheek, and her hair was tousled. She gave him no greeting.

"Oh, it's you," she said, and as she turned he saw that one of her shoes was split down the heel and had frayed her stocking into what was known in the family as a "potato."

He heaved his bag into the lobby and passed along to the dining-room, where he found his mother. She was, as he knew she would be, doing crochet-work. He kissed her.

"How brown you are!" she said.

"It's been wonderful weather. Aunt Janet sent you some shortbread and some knitted things."

"I wish she wouldn't. She can't knit, and she's forgotten how old you are, and makes things as if you were still children. But she's very good to us. I don't know what I should have done without her."

"She said she admired you more than she can say."

"I've done my best for you."



"She said you married a bad Fourmy."

"I wish she hadn't said that."

René responded to his mother's embarrassment, but he could not spare her.

"Is that true. Was my father a bad man?"

"He was a gentleman. The Fourmys are proud, clever people. They think they are always right, and they want everything their own way. That is all very well if you have money. But, without it— But why talk of it? It's all done."

"Did you love my father?"

Mrs. Fourmy brought her hands down into her lap and stopped plying her needle.

"What's come to you, René?"

He longed to tell his mother that he too loved, and could therefore understand, but his question had so disarmed her, her eyes looked so frightened, so expectant of hurt, that he could not continue.

"Oh," he said, "it's just queer, coming back. One can feel all sorts of things in the house, and——"

"You are like your father in many ways." And she resumed her crochet.

That alarmed him. Like his father? He felt indignant and uncomfortably self-conscious. He contrasted his hitherto exemplary and successful career with those mean memories—lying abed, whisky and cigarettes. He began to protest:

"But he——"

"He was always talking about feeling things the same as you. There was a lot of good in your father though his own people would never admit it, and mine

## YOUNG EARNEST

could never see it—— But it's no good talking. It's all done."

"He left you."

"A boy like you can't judge a man."

"Oh, but I know."

"You can't get anything for the like of that out of books. There's some men can stay with a woman and some can't, and which you'll be you'll know when you come to it."

René stared at his mother. She looked very small, sitting there by the empty fireplace. She seemed to be talking to him from a great distance away, from beyond the Something which he had always felt to be in life. In the glade in Scotland he had thought to have surmounted it, but now, when he thought of it, that had already dwindled away and become as small and rounded as that memory of his father which had haunted him in his waiting. Cathleen seemed so remote that he was alarmed. The foundations of omnipotent everlasting love were undermined! Worst of all, he knew that it had become impossible to talk of her. Not even her image in his mind could dwell in that house. And his mother—his mother was saying horrible, worldly things in a thin, weary voice. In fierce rebellion his innocence rose up against her. It was impossible for him to admit a fall from grace. Either you loved or you did not. If you loved, it was forever. If you did not, then you were damned past all hope; at least you were, if you were a man. All women were *Dulcineas* to this *Quixote*.

So moved was he, so distressed, that he lost the

sequence of his thoughts, and they pursued their careers in his head regardless of his comfort or immediate needs. He was left inarticulate.

"You'll catch all the flies in the house in your mouth if you don't close it," said his mother.

He snapped his teeth together, and said fiercely:

"All the same, if I treated a woman as my father treated you, I'd shoot myself."

"Absurd you are. A man needs a fair conceit of himself to do that. And can't a woman learn to have a life of her own?"

"Women——" began René, but his mother cut him short in a soothing voice that was almost a caress:

"Keep that for the young ones, my dear. I'm too old to be told what women are and are not, or to care. Shall we have the shortbread for tea? George is to be in with Elsie."

"Who's Elsie?"

"Didn't I tell you? George is going to be married."

"George is?"

"Yes." Mrs. Fourmy gave a chuckle that for so tiny a woman was surprisingly large. "Yes, George has been almost as good at falling in love as you."

That bowled René middle-stump, and he went out to bring in his bag and unpack the shortbread and the Shetland jacket he had bought in Inverness for his mother.

She tried it on and preened herself in it.

"Smart I am. You're a kind boy to me. Do you remember how you two boys used to say when you were grown up you would be rich and take me to my

## YOUNG EARNEST

old home in Wiltshire? George won't, now he's going to be married."

"But I will," said René. "When I've saved money and can retire, we'll go and live together."

"I don't know. It's easy to forget old women."

"Oh, come! A man doesn't forget his mother."

"Doesn't he?"

"And old? You're not old."

"I've been old since before you were born."

René gazed down at his mother and marveled at her in painful astonishment. In her little quiet voice she was saying things that stabbed into him, or, hardly stabbing, abraded and bruised him. And suddenly he began almost to perceive that her life was not tranquil, not the smooth pale flowing he had imagined it to be. He stared down at her, and she raised her eyes so that they met his. He dared not even tremble, so fearful was he of betraying his divination and her eyes flashed a warning, and his mind seized triumphantly upon its first intellectual mastery of emotion, and he said to himself:

"There are certain feelings and currents of sympathy which can only dwell in silence."

Then he laughed:

"You must have been pretty when you were a girl."

"Oh," said Mrs. Fourmy, taking up her crochet, "my hair was lovely."

With that she rose and busied herself with preparing tea, taking out the caddy in which the party brand was kept, and her best table-center and the orna-



ments which were reserved for the few elegant occasions the household could admit.

"I got a pair of sleeve-links for George," said René. "Silver and agate. When's he going to be married? They might do for a wedding present as well."

"They are going to be married at once. They've got to be."

"I say!" He spun round on that. "I say. Need you have told me? When she's coming here and all!"

But Mrs. Fourmy was remorseless. She said with biting coldness:

"When George was a little boy, he found out when I was married and reckoned up from that to the day when he was born, and he let me know that he knew. He told you too."

"Yes. He told me. How did you know?"

"You looked at me all one Sunday afternoon with your big eyes."

"Oh, mother!"

"There they are. George has forgotten the key. Will you go to the door? Polly has chosen to-day to clean the kitchen out. She would. She isn't fit to be seen."

René went to the door.

"Hullo! old man!"—René hated to be called "old man"—"Hullo! Got back?"

"Only just."

"This is Elsie—Elsie Sherman. Mother's told you?"

Elsie was pretty, as tall as René, and just a shade

## YOUNG EARNEST

taller than George. She took the hand René held out, and squeezed it warmly.

"So you're the wonderful brother?"

"Yes. The—— Yes, I'm George's brother. You—you can take your things off in mother's room if you like."

"Or mine," said George.

"Don't be silly. I couldn't," said Elsie, with a giggle that made René hate her. She ran upstairs and George patted his brother on the shoulder.

"Well? Still good enough for us? What do you think of her?"

"She's pretty."

"When you know her a bit you'll want to go and do likewise, my son."

Standing there huddled with his brother in the narrow lobby that seemed all coats and umbrellas, René remembered with a horrible vividness his brother coming to his bed and telling him how his father and mother were married on such a day and how, five months later, he, George, was born. And he remembered how he burst into tears, and when George asked him what he was howling for, he had said: "They didn't want you," a view of the matter to which George had remained insensible. He saw now that the revelation had broken the young intimacy that had always been between them. He said:

"Mother's got out her best center for you."

"Good old mother!" replied George. Then he raised his voice and bawled:

"Elsie!"

"Coming!"

She came running downstairs. George caught and kissed her, and as they went along the passage René wondered how it could be possible for one extra person to make the house seem overfull.

It was certainly a party. Mrs. Fourmy set the note, a ceremonious expansiveness in opening up the family to its new member. René's achievements were paraded, and the letter written by his headmaster, which had finally decided the family that he was too good for commerce, was produced and read aloud. George's virtues as a son were extolled and punctuated with his protest:

"I say, mother, draw it mild."

And Elsie's rather too fervent:

"Of course I know I'm *very* lucky."

They played bridge and René lost fourpence, because he played with his mother, who never could remember to suit her declarations to her score, or to return her partner's lead, and had no other notion of play than to make her aces while she could.

Elsie talked of her family, especially of a rich uncle she had who kept a timber yard and of a cousin who was a Wesleyan minister. Of her own immediate relations she spoke affectionately but little. Altogether she was so anxious to please that René forgot his first distasteful impression and set himself to make her laugh. She was grateful to him for that. The evening would not have been a success for her without abundant laughter, and George's jokes were just a little heavy. Also she seemed to be slightly afraid

## YOUNG EARNEST

of him, as though in all her responses to him were a small risk, rather more, at any rate, than she could always venture to take. She warmed to René, therefore, and between them they kept things lively.

In a silence while George was dealing—for he took his bridge very seriously—René hummed a bar or two of a piece called *Blumenlied*, which he had been taught to play as a boy when he worked off the set of music lessons George had begun and relinquished.

"Oh, *Blumenlied*!" cried Elsie; "I adore that," and she took up the air.

"You've got a pretty voice," said René.

"Have I? I do sing sometimes."

"Sings?" said George. "I should think so. The family's a concert party. Everything from the human voice to a piccolo."

They finished the rubber and adjourned to the parlor, where Mrs. Fourmy drew sweet buzzing notes from the little old piano that seemed to have come into the world at the same time as herself and to have shared her experience. She knew all its tricks and could dodge its defects, and when she played faded songs that had had their day, and Elsie sang them, René was melted into a mood of loving kindness and was full of gratitude to the two women, and wished only for their happiness—an eternity of such happiness as they were giving him now.

He kissed Elsie when she said good-by. She lived only a few streets away, and George asked him to sit up for him. When the couple were gone:



"Well?" said Mrs. Fourmy, more to the fireplace than to her son.

"She's too good for George." René thought with dislike of his brother, sitting with his eyes half-closed, taking a too voluptuous delight in the music and showing a too proprietary pride in the singer.

"She suits him," rejoined his mother. "George wants to settle down. So does she. Most people are like that. They settle down, and they think nothing else can happen to them. You're not like that."

"I don't know. To settle down——"

"Love songs. You think it's all love songs. They think it's all love songs, or they try to. Warm and comfortable. Oh, but I've seen it too often."

"Why do you keep hinting at things, mother?"

"I wasn't hinting. I know, and you will know, and they never will. I could have screamed sometimes to-night."

"I thought you liked her."

"Like? Oh, René, boy, if only you'd grow up and be some use to me!"

"I want to be."

"I know that, and it's something."

"Are you hurt because they——?"

"I've been a foolish woman. I've been seeing more hope for George than there ever was."

She took up the box of matches from the chimney-piece and stood fingering it. He hoped she would say more, but nothing came. The disconcerting sense of the otherness of his mother's world played about him, and he felt helpless and rather fatuous.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Bed's the best place for me," she said. "You don't know how I've been dreading this evening. And it's gone off very well, very well. Good night, my dear. I'm glad you came home to-day."

She astonished him by kissing him on both cheeks, for ordinarily she held up her face and he stooped and pecked at it. To-night there was a kind of suspension of the habits of the household.

He heard her go upstairs, and with surprising celerity get into bed. Then he sat alone waiting in the dim, jaded dining-room, with the enormous table designed for a hospitality which was never given, and the corner cupboard which had been in all the houses the family had inhabited, and the hanging smoker's cabinet over the mantelpiece which was used as a medicine chest, and the absurd knick-knacks his father had collected, and the plaques his father had painted with apples and cherry-blossom and bulrushes. There was so much in the room that spoke of his father. The whisky and the boxes of cigarettes used to be kept in the corner cupboard. On the table he had helped his father to make the screen out of old Christmas numbers and colored plates of the *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News*, which had given him employment during the whole of one winter. And he was stirred by the memory of the emotions that must have been behind his mother's strange incoherence, and he told himself that she had suffered, and that his father was to blame for it all and could meet with no fate too harsh.

George returned, whistling.

"I wanted to talk to you," he said.

"Anything you like," replied René.

"You won't mind my putting it bluntly?"

"No."

"Well, you see how it is. I've got a rise, but Elsie hasn't a stiver, and we shall only have enough to pull through on. My money goes out of this house. You've had a soft time up to now; you can't go on. If you want to stay in the house you'll have to buckle to and earn some money, or move to another, or lodgings; but even in the cheapest lodgings it would be a squeeze with mother's little bit."

"I see. But I've got another year."

"Can't you teach someone something? You've been learning long enough."

"I might. I see I must do something. When are you going to be married?"

"Next month. What are you staring at?"

"Was I staring?"

"When you were a kid I used to hit you for staring at me like that, and, by God, I'd like to do it now. Elsie said, she said: 'Your brother's got all his feelings just under his skin.' Why don't you say something?"

George rose, went to the corner cupboard and took out a bottle of whisky. The gesture, the lift of the shoulder, the cock of the back of the head, reminded René irresistibly of his father. George turned.

"Why can't you stop staring? I'm going to be married. I'm no different. There's nothing very startling in that, is there?"

## YOUNG EARNEST

"The whole thing seems to me so——"

He stopped, staring more wildly. The word he suppressed was *greedy*, and it was most painfully explanatory.

"So what?"

"I mean—I liked her. She seems a good sort."

"No nonsense about Elsie."

"Doesn't it make you understand mother more?"

"Mother? She's a queer little devil. Didn't speak to me for a fortnight after I told her, and she took to going to church again. She's a rum 'un, is mother. I believe she'd do anything if it wasn't she's so darned fond of you."

"Oh, you think it's me?"

"If it wasn't for you she'd have chucked the whole thing long ago and gone right off into a convent or something. She doesn't like the money part of it being put off on to you. Really, I don't think she minded anything else. She knows what life is, mother does."

"How will you live?"

"Oh, a snug little house. Her father'll give us furniture. He's an old sport, he is. Keeps the Denmark, you know, in Upper Kite Street. 'Normous family. Delighted when the girls go off. Elsie worked in a shop. No more work for Elsie."

"You're pleased with yourself, then?"

"I'm going to be married; that's good enough for any man. Married and settled down. That's life."

"Is it?" René found George entirely absurd, and he laughed.



"Oh, well," he added, "mother and I will find a way. Good night."

"Good night," replied George. "Go and dream of your books and your swells. My Elsie'll beat all their women. I know those swell ladies. Good night."

Upstairs, in his little room, René took pen, ink, and paper, and wrote to Cathleen:

"This house is exactly like thirty-one other houses. Parlor, kitchen, dining-room, three bedrooms above them. That's all. And they are all full of grubby little lives and the material things they don't express themselves in. Do you see what I mean? Coming straight from you, from our woods, from the tall bracken and the heather, I feel trapped. What I miss, I think, is graciousness. Oh, yes! That is the word. All the charming ways you have. The easy courtesies with which you smooth over any roughnesses, any lack of sympathy, so that, even among uncongenial people, silence is not devastating. And between you and me silence can be so beautiful, so full of something more melodious than sound. But here, if there is silence, little uglinesses creep out of dark corners and fill it. They do not seem to know the difference between silence and emptiness. My mother has almost frightened me. I can't tell you. Something terrible and yet silly has happened. I don't understand. Some things hurt my feelings so that I can never understand them. But my mother was wonderful all the same, and different, so different that I was not at all surprised at her. I suppose I knew it

## YOUNG EARNEST

all along. She has suffered as women must not, must not, must not suffer, as I will never let you suffer. I cannot write love words to you. I can only tell you that I am building up my life toward you. I have changed. It all seems enormously serious suddenly. A lot that we have had seems silly. I want to explain to you. It is terrible that I can't see you again for a whole year, terrible, terrible. But I love you. I have begun to see what love is, what a man can be to a woman if he does not drag her down to his own level. Lovers, I think, should have something wonderful, something that should illuminate everything so that even the darkest places and happenings are bearable. Oh, you see what I mean. I am trying to bring it all, what I feel, to you. You must understand. This year is different from last, more serious, more beautiful. Think what it will be when we are ready to be together. When I think of it I am almost afraid. No one is ever ready for that, so holy is love. Holy! Holy! Holy! A little boy's voice in a church singing that expresses it as nothing else can. I have to begin to earn my living."

He had got so far with his pen racing along in the wake of his thoughts when his mother knocked at his door:

"Do go to bed, Réne, dear. You're not working already?"

"No, mother. I wasn't working."

"Then you mustn't stay up, wasting the gas and all."

### III

#### GEORGE MARRIED

'Tis an evil lot, and yet  
Let us make the best of it;  
If love can live when pleasure dies  
We two will love, till in our eyes  
This heart's Hell seem paradise.

GEORGE married and settled in the newly developed region behind Hog Lane West. Before he went, he spent a whole evening with his mother and brother making a list of his possessions, and arguing with them when they claimed a chair or a piece of china he had bought as family property. They had been purchased with *his* money, and they had only enjoyed a right of user.—(His firm had been through protracted litigation in the Chancery Courts, and he was up in legal phrases.)—They must have known that sooner or later he would have a house of his own. The procuring of a wife seemed to have aggravated George's acquisitive sense. He was exceedingly conscious of the extension of his personality and was groping round for material things wherewith to fortify it. More and more he treated his brother with condescension, and was continually hinting at the

## YOUNG EARNEST

things marriage did for a man. He had not been so grossly jubilant since his first encounter with woman, whereof he had given René a full and rapturous account. René had been more able to understand that excitement than this. To George the two adventures were apparently of the same order; to René they were profoundly different, and his brother's boisterousness induced misery in him. What his mother made of it all, he could not discover. All day long, and often late at night she was crocheting at a bed-quilt which she was anxious to have finished against the wedding. The savage communicativeness which had so disturbed René on the night of his home-coming was succeeded by silence and silly chatter, and she was constantly and mysteriously busy at George's house or with Elsie at the shops.

Cathleen Bentley had written:

"How can you have such a brother? But he is great fun. Tell me more. And I adore your mother. If only we could be engaged, I would come and stay with you."

René described:

"George keeps hinting at Things in marriage. He is rather like a man dreaming of good food, a series of meals magically prepared and set before him so that he does not need to rise. One meal is cleared away and another appears. I find it hard to grasp. I imagine his life otherwise must be dull, though he never seems to mind that. He is what you call Steady; has been in the same office since he was sixteen, and will go on in it until he is sixty and past work. Perhaps



## GEORGE MARRIED

all his desire and hope go into this adventure. Perhaps he feels that nothing lies beyond it, and is therefore cramming everything into it. Certainly he is not allowing himself room to develop anything out of it. There's a sort of desperation in him. Now or never. After all, I suppose he's getting what he wants, but there is a heat in it which blisters me. That must be because I have known a cool, sweet love with you. How did it happen? You must try to understand, look down into the lives of people on a lower level than your own. We have no organized pleasures, at least not enough of them, and we are really thrown back on the man and maiden business, casual for the most part. We feel the grubbiness of it, but they don't. It's fire and warmth to them. Primitive, isn't it? Like savages rubbing two sticks together. It doesn't leave much room for affection or charm. It has to be raw or they can't believe in it, inarticulate as they are, and as I am too often. We can't make material existence a starting-point as you more favored ones can do if you choose. Love simply doesn't have a chance with us. I think you could bring a wonderful happiness into my mother's life. I keep wanting to tell her about you, and one of these days I shall. Will you send her some flowers from your garden? We have a backyard only with five privet bushes growing round an old bicycle shed. . . ."

Writing to Cathleen was his safety-valve. He could find George amusing when he had written to her, and when he had a letter from her he could almost salute his brother as a fellow-lover.

## YOUNG EARNEST

The wedding was a noble piece of work. It was at St. Clement's in Upper Kite Street, not a hundred yards away from the Denmark, where there was a rousing breakfast to which Mr. Sherman had invited his cronies and patrons. There were ponderous jokes about perambulators, and George, in an excited little speech, said that when he had a house large enough to accommodate all his family, he would be able to invite those friends who had come to see him and his Elsie married. Two or three old women wept; rice, confetti, and slippers were thrown after the happy pair as they drove off for their honeymoon, and in the afternoon the party went by train to Cheadley Edge and visited the caves, and wandered in the woods, and ate an enormous high tea at Yarker's, the farmhouse which devoted one of its meadows to coeanut-shies and roundabouts, and its garden to tea-parties. It was all good, vulgar, noisy fun, and René was caught in a series of flirtations with Elsie's sisters and their friends. He kept finding their hands in his as they swung or walked or sat at tea, and they seemed to enter into a competition to be isolated with him in the woods or the caves, but not one of them established an exclusive right to him for the day, and by the return in the evening the party was split up into couples and he found himself thrown with his mother, who had throughout shown a stiff front to pleasantries and was exhausted by jollifications which for her had not been jolly.

Sitting by her side in the tram as they drove from the station, René found himself dreading the return to

## GEORGE MARRIED

Hog Lane West. George had been an alien, but a convenient buffer between them. Now they had to establish a new order of living. George's absence was an actuality with which they had to deal more vigorously than with his presence. They left his room empty. Neither had any use for it. The dining-room had been the living-room of the family. Without George, René and his mother found themselves relapsing into oppressive silences, and very soon he took to leaving her in the evenings, and going up to his bedroom and his books and his work.

He was singularly friendless. His schoolmates had gone into offices and regarded with strange and rather alarmed eyes his continued pursuit of academic courses, and in his first years at the university he had undergone a violent spasm of mental growth which had left him shy and diffident, resentful of anything that seemed like intrusion upon his brooding, and impatient of surface relationships and the too easy friendliness which he saw current on all sides. Also he was chafed by his position of semi-dependence upon his relations, and rather scared by the possibility of not doing well enough in his examinations to justify what was constantly being impressed upon him as his exceptional opportunity. Therefore he worked on a time-table in term and out of it, never less than nine hours a day; morning, afternoon, and evening; and rather harder in vacation than in term. He had no smallest notion what it was all for. He had an unusual faculty for learning things and arrangements of ideas, and could always answer examination ques-

## YOUNG EARNEST

tions lucidly, and had so small a conceit of himself that his work was never spoiled by a nervous anxiety to excel nor interfered with by the emotionalism of the clever young. He had a sound, all-round ability, never expected anything to be difficult, and could quickly master the elements of any study he took up. When that study led away from practical considerations he was apt to lose interest in it. He had stopped short of philosophy and pure mathematics, and the astuteness of his headmaster had led him in his last year at school to specialize in history and economics. When he was sent up for a scholarship at Cambridge, he failed because the beauty of the Backs had so stirred his rather sluggish emotions as to cause him temporarily to lose his lucidity and shrewdness in dealing with examination questions, so that he wrote rather at large—thoroughly enjoying himself—than with particular reference to the matter in hand. However, he had already won a County Council Scholarship, and with this he entered Thrigsby University. There he had done well and had picked up exhibitions and bursaries, striving for success not so much because he wanted it, as because it was expected of him.

He lived now in a strange disquietude, reading his set books, Adam Smith, Malthus, Ricardo, Marshall, Cannan, Jevons, various works by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, amusing himself with the advanced diagrammatic economists, and grinding away at his special subject, Coöperation, from the Rochdale pioneers to the European “movement.” All this he did mechani-



## GEORGE MARRIED

cally. His brain had been set going in a certain direction by amiable instructors whom he had never seen any reason to doubt, and it was pleasant to let it go on so moving toward that examination which was to be a gate leading to a profession higher than the life of commerce from which he had been reclaimed.

So far, so good; but George's marriage had caused a stir-about in him. In the first place, it posed a domestic problem in economics that could not be solved on paper, and in the second it had roused him to moral revolt. He could not forget his affection for George. They had been great companions as little boys. He himself was in love, knew that love was sweet, and could not away with the fact that George's marriage was to some extent a denial of all he had learned and gained in his own hours of tenderness. He hated to resist the idea that George was perfectly happy, but he could not help himself. His was no literary enthusiasm for romance and noble love. He had read very few romances, and of poetry he knew no more than the anthology to which Cathleen had introduced him. On the whole, he preferred comfort above all things, and George made him uncomfortable, set stirring in him an idealism, a fervor, which so swelled in him as to make him, even in his outpourings to his beloved, incapable of stringing his ideas together. Literary persons can gain a great deal of relief by the mere reiteration of the words "I love you," with variations. Words were to René only implements, painfully inadequate, for digging out the fineness which he had begun to perceive behind his feelings.

## YOUNG EARNEST

He could not forgive George for being content with mere feelings undisciplined and unrefined. He hoped innocently that the honeymoon would bring some revelation, but when bride and bridegroom returned they were more distressing than ever. They had lost their shyness. That was all. George was fatly, complacently "settled down," and could never leave his wife alone for half an hour on end, but must be always touching her, teasing her, or openly caressing her, and she seemed to like it and to make a parade of his attentions.

René would come away boiling from an evening spent at their house, which they had called The Nest, and he would sit, either cooling himself with his large books, or heightening his fury with letters to Cathleen, now returned to Putney, which is called London. He never revised what he wrote. He had rather forgotten the charm of his boyish love-making, and had lost the young trick of visualizing his fair, needing more from her than her beauty, and now used her as an outlet, assuming in her a sympathy which neither her past conduct nor her letters revealed. The mere fact of writing was enough, and his letters became intimate and self-revelatory, a kind of running, general confession. Sometimes they were of enormous length, and the envelopes he sent away were bulky and bulging.

One night he stopped in the middle of a letter, turned back and read, realizing that he had laid bare the whole of his brother's sexual life so far as he knew it. He was filled with a thick horror, tore the letter

## GEORGE MARRIED

up, and went down to his mother to escape from the train of thought which had led to such indiscretion and betrayal. He did not escape, but found himself plunged in confession:

"Mother, I'm in love."

"Well, I never! You're not going to be married now?"

"No. It's hopeless. She's rich. At least her father is."

"So that's why you look so queerly at Elsie. You can't expect them to be all alike."

"It isn't only that. Only I can't get away from certain things."

"What things?"

"The horrible things people do."

"You'll be kept busy if you worry about that."

"It's about myself."

"Want to confess? Go on."

"I mean, George and I used to talk—you know. Well, it got beyond talk. Uncle Alfred gave me ten shillings once. I spent it—that way."

"Well, well."

"You can't dismiss it like that. I shouldn't be remembering it if it were so easy as that. I met her—you know—in Derby Street——"

"You're not going to tell me the whole story?"

"I must tell someone. I met her and she took me down a lot of streets. She walked along briskly in a business-like way, and I slunk along behind with my coat collar turned up and my cap over my eyes, and I kept shivering, though it wasn't cold. We came to a

## YOUNG EARNEST

little house and she knocked at the door, and a fat woman with red arms came to it. She just looked at us and said: 'Full up.' We went on to another little house, but I couldn't get that out of my mind, and the room there was so horrible that I ran away, and that's all."

Mrs. Fourmy looked up at the clock, into the fire, round at the corner cupboard. At last she said:

"Well, you are a funny boy."

"I'm in love all right," he said; "but I feel as if I'd never like to marry and just go on with you forever and ever. I could find a sort of happiness in just making enough for us to live on."

His mother came over to him and laid her hands on his shoulders:

"Don't make trouble for yourself, my dear. Don't do that. Let things alone. Trouble comes fast enough, and all your plans and thoughts and hopes aren't enough to deal with them. That's your father all over. Always wanting a little better than he got, and always getting a little worse than he deserved. Suppose we go out together once a week. That'll stop us getting into the way of sitting too much alone. And if the girl's the right sort of girl she won't let being rich and all that stand in her way."

René patted her hand.

"It's awfully good of you to listen," he said; "I feel better already. Only George——"

"Don't let George worry you. He can do things you can't. George can keep his mind out of things like that."



## GEORGE MARRIED

He felt immensely relieved. His confession seemed to have filled the vacancy left by George. Between himself and his mother there was established a more living relationship. There had been some authority in her comfortable words which had led him back to the old unconsidered position in which she was the central warmth of the home in which he lived. For a time at least he could be at rest and accept that things were so because they were so and not otherwise.

Gradually they won back to happy insignificant chatter, and planned that on the following evening they would go to a music-hall together.

The postman broke in upon their talk. He brought two letters for René. One was from Cathleen, and very short:

"There's been a row. I've been howling all night. I can't write any more. They can't understand. Vulgar they call you, and they are furious with me. They read one of your letters, opened it if you please. Not fit for a young girl. I'm not to have a heart till I can captivate a rich man old or young, and I am never to have a mind. It's just beastly the things they say, but I can do nothing."

The other letter was from her mother:

"DEAR SIR,—I have read your last letter to my daughter. It is not fit reading for a young girl, or indeed for any pure woman. You will oblige me by not writing again, and I have forbidden my daughter to continue your acquaintance."

He passed both letters over to his mother.

"I told you it was hopeless."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"If you ask my opinion," replied his mother, "I should say you were well rid of her."

"But I can't help loving her."

Mrs. Fourmy sniffed indignantly:

"Love! Well, you can call it love if you like."

"I do," said he very earnestly.

On which his mother staggered him by saying:

"George wouldn't."

In spite of himself, and against the grain, René began to think a little enviously of his brother, master unperplexed of his own and another life.

## IV

### A RETURN

Why, among us a drowning man has to make for himself the very straw he's to clutch at!

**B**OTH René and his mother were excited all day over their projected visit to a music-hall.

Thrigsby had ten of these places of amusement, and they found it hard to decide which to patronize. Only one was outside the possibility of choice, because it had performing seals in the bill, and Mrs. Fourmy could not bear to see animals on the stage. René was for the low comedians, his mother for music; and at last, in the program of one of the suburban halls, she found a musical turn which had once given her immense pleasure. She talked of it all afternoon, adding all the time so generously to its wonder that René began to fear she would be disappointed with the actuality. But her anticipation was so firm as to overbear any shortcomings in the performance, and she saw and heard only what she expected to see and hear. For René there was a very droll comedian who made him shout with laughter. Mrs. Fourmy was shocked at a joke at the expense of the Deity and those who go to heaven, but she was so delighted with her son's pleas-

## YOUNG EARNEST

ure that she swallowed her distaste and laughed too. All the way home they recapitulated their moments of delight, and laughed and melted in remembrance.

It was a lovely evening, and they walked through a residential park, the roads of which were private and flanked and overhung with trees. Lovers lurked in the shadows, and their sweet murmuring could be heard. Mrs. Fourmy took her son's arm:

"You and an old woman like me."

"Won't it be lovely when we live in the country, mother?"

"Oh, but there won't be any music-halls."

"We won't need them in the country with the nights. You should have seen them in Scotland. I used to go into the woods, and sometimes up the hills."

"But with an old, old woman——"

"I won't let you be really old, mother. And up there I used to feel that I didn't really want anybody. That's queer, because I was in love—really, I was."

He began to tingle and burn at the thought of Cathleen and the absurd end of his hopes, and almost tearfully to realize that he was not yet out of love. That discomfort gave him a sense of gladness in his mother's company. It was wonderful the sweetness that had come into their life together, the peace of it and the hope.

He said:

"It won't be long before I can begin to make some money. I'm only waiting for Professor Smallman to come back. His letter was awfully kind. He says there will be no difficulty. I can get first-year pupils,



## A RETURN

and he can help me to find some journalistic work. Then when I've got my degree I'll get a post, and you won't have to take any more money from the rich Fourmys."

"It's only what helps you now. You don't seem to be a bit ambitious, René."

"Would you like me to be?"

"But you're so clever and everybody else is so stupid. It seems so funny of you to be so pleased with anything you can get."

"Funny?" He could hardly grasp what she meant. She went on:

"You're so good-looking, too. I shouldn't be surprised if you got on and married somebody who was—well, you know."

There was a strain of bitterness in his mother which could infuriate him. To-night he was so happy with her that it made him only sad, and he said gently:

"I don't think I'm the sort that gets on. I say things—in letters, you know."

"But I'd like to see you well off and married to some really nice girl."

"And I'd like to see the girl who could make me give up the idea of living in the country with you."

"I'll come and stay with you."

So they went on gently sparring, both clinging to their separate idylls of the future. They came out of the park into the streets of little shops and small houses like their own, and stopped presently at the German delicatessen store, where they argued as to what they should have for supper, ham or liver sau-

## YOUNG EARNEST

sage. They compromised, and decided on both, with little Swiss cheeses and honey-cakes.

As they came out into Hog Lane West they were accosted by a man who asked René if he could tell him where Hog Lane West was, and which way he should turn to find 166.

"That's my house," said René.

The stranger moved closer to him and had a long look at him. René felt a tug at his arm, and turned to find his mother trembling against him.

"René! René! it's your father!"

"Is it you, Essie?" said the stranger, and he removed his hat.

"You—you—— I'm afraid," said René chokingly, "I'm afraid you'll find the door shut against you. I've—I've often thought what I should do if I set eyes on you again. That's what I shall do. I can't let you come."

"Essie," the stranger turned to Mrs. Fourmy, "I'm dead broke."

"You must come and tell us, but you mustn't stay. We've been out, René and I. We've got supper."

Her voice thinned away. She could speak no more. Her hand pressed René to move on, and they set out toward their house with the man following. René held the garden gate open, and stayed for a moment fumbling for his key. When he found it, his father and mother were standing silhouetted against the glass panel of the door. He let them in, and, obeying an obscure instinct that stirred in him, went upstairs to leave them alone together. Not for long. He found

## A RETURN

that in his confusion he had taken the viands with him. He gained a few moments in the kitchen preparing a tray (Polly was out for the evening and not yet returned), and then, with the dishes clattering as he walked, he rejoined them in the dining-room.

He had not consciously expected anything, but as he entered the dining-room he saw his father with his back turned to him at the corner cupboard with his hand on the key, his head cocked, his shoulders up, very like George, and it was as though he had foreseen it. It was uncanny and his heart ached in a sort of dread.

His mother's face was shining with a glowing excitement, and she looked away from him as she said:

"Your father wants us to let him stay for a little. There's George's room, you know, and I want him to."

René felt helpless. The emergency was too strong for him.

"All right," he said.

His father turned and smiled pleasantly.

"That's good of you—very good of you. I'd be in the cart without. I'm—well—I've been—— But we'll talk of that later."

"Talk!" murmured René, aghast. "Who would talk? Who could find anything to say?" Miserably he laid out the plates round the big hospitable table, so big, so hospitable, that it was out of place and forbidding.

Mr. Fourmy had already helped himself to whisky. (George always kept a bottle in the house in case he and Elsie should drop in of an evening.) They drew

## YOUNG EARNEST

up to the table and went through a mockery of eating. The bread was bitter in René's mouth, and the dainties they had bought were tasteless. Mrs. Fourmy talked in a toneless twittering voice of the music-hall performance, while René stole glances at his father and avoided meeting his eyes. If he met his eyes he felt, in spite of himself, amused, charmed, tickled, somehow pleased, and with that pleasure was mixed a salt savor of pity, so that it was irresistible and led on wonderfully to a sure promise of adventure. René kept muttering to himself: "He's a bad man. A bad Fourmy, and you can't do worse than that." This memory he flung with a look at his mother, only to realize as he looked that she had no thought for him, but, like him, was stealing glances at his father and avoiding meeting the little keen humorous eyes. And his father went on eating hungrily and heartily. Half a loaf of bread he ate, and two-thirds of the ham and all the liver sausage. Then he looked wistfully at the honey-cakes, but desisted, produced a packet of cigarettes, and began to smoke.

"That's good," he said. "My first square meal since this morning. That's good, good."

He moved from the table into the big red velvet chair by the fire.

"Good, very good. And it's a real home-coming. After all, this isn't so very different from the old house."

"It's bigger," said René.

His father turned and scanned him.

"I can hardly realize you yet, young man. Can't



## A RETURN

allow for your growing up. Can only just trace the face I remember. Your nose has grown."

"You used to have a mustache."

"Yes. Shaved it off in America. Didn't like Roosevelt."

"Have you been to America?"

"Been the devil's own dance, up and down America, North and South, Philippines, Malay Settlement—that's Rangoon—China, back to America. Wonderful how you meet Thrigsby folk all over the world. Hundreds of young men everywhere who seem to have been at school with you and George. I've had enough. Want to settle down."

"Like George."

"Isn't George coming in?"

"He's married."

"The devil he is! And am I a grandfather? Lord! what a world it is for breeding! Think of me just fifty and a grandfather. What things do happen to a man, to be sure."

"If only you wouldn't talk," protested René in a sudden exasperation.

"To be sure," returned his father genially. "I'm the prodigal. Must give you time to take me in while we digest the fatted calf."

"It's not that!" René was swept by his indignation on to his feet. "It isn't that! Only I never thought of this. You come in, and you sit there in your old chair as though you'd only gone out yesterday. And it's over ten years, and I can hardly remember you, and I know all the time that you're my father, and

## YOUNG EARNEST

—and—I don't know you. It's simply beastly. I don't know why it is, but it is."

"René! René!" cried his mother.

"Steady, old girl," said Mr. Fourmy, with an almost tender firmness. He turned quietly round in his chair until he was looking sideways up at René. "Look here, young man, it takes two to make a scene, and I won't have it. It's no good trying to make a scene simply because you expected to have one if ever I came back. I spanked you the day before I left for throwing a knife at your brother in one of your bare-sark fits, and for two pins I'd turn you up and spank you now."

Then René's memory played him a scurvy trick. "Boot or brush?" he asked himself, and a sick anger rose in him and hot tears welled into his eyes. He gasped and gurgled inarticulately, thinking he was making an appeal to his mother, but through his tears he seemed to see his father growing larger and larger, and in a gust of terror he lunged out of the room, seized his cap, and rushed from the house.

"It isn't fair! it isn't fair!" he moaned.

Other young men he knew had difficulties with their fathers, but to have a father suddenly materialize out of thin air and step back with exasperating ease into a relationship which a part of his family at least had forgotten, was too critical for the mind to bear. René had been priding himself on the fact that at last he was to be as other young men, a wage-earner, a reputable citizen, a prop to his mother, a credit to his family and his own aspirations. And here suddenly he

## A RETURN

was to begin all over again. His painful emotions were akin to those of a small boy on the arrival of a new baby in his home, or to those of a tit on finding a cuckoo's monstrous egg in its nest, and, being of a cultivated intelligence, he could not immediately and robustly draw on his instinct to adjust himself to the new circumstances.

He called on George. The Nest was in darkness. He went on hammering at the door until the window above it was thrown open.

"Who's there?" snarled George. "If it's the police, the window's left open for the cat, and I'm damned if I shut it."

"It's me—Réne!"

"What the hell do you want at this time of night?"

"I must see you. Something has happened."

"What?"

"Come down and let me in."

He was filled with a cold and shuddering feeling of being ridiculous as he waited. He wanted to run away, but that would have been even more absurd. The chain of the door rattled, the bolts rapped back, and George said:

"Come in. You've wakened Elsie, and she's not at all well."

"But I wanted to see you. Father's come back."

"What?"

"Father's come back."

"Mother all right?"

"She seems quite pleased."

"Then there's nothing more to be said. If you

## YOUNG EARNEST

don't like him, tell him he's got to pay the rent. That'll clear him out fast enough. Good night."

George seized René by the arm, lifted him through the door on to the step, closed the door, shot the bolts and the chain. In his astonishment René found himself nearly back at 166 before he could realize the outrage that had been done to his feelings. He had wanted to tell George that the atmosphere of the house was just horrible, and George had never thought of that.

166 was in darkness too. How grim these little houses were in the darkness! How they invited violence and the wickedness of the night! How derelict they seemed! How fit for the harboring of wandering, evil men! Now he thought of his father as evil, a shadow come to obliterate the brightness that had grown and filled the house since George's departure.

He let himself in, saw that all the lights were out downstairs, the large coals taken from the dining-room fire, the windows and doors fastened. Then he crept upstairs on tiptoe in his stockinged feet and groped fearfully toward his mother's door, half dreading some awful discovery. He could hear no sound. As he passed George's room there came out of it his father's rich, familiar snore.



## V

### SETTLING DOWN

O the mad days that I have spent! and to see how many of mine old acquaintances are dead!

PROFESSOR SMALLMAN had been lent by his university to deliver a series of lectures in America, and some weeks of the term would pass before his return. René, therefore, had no escape from his father. Breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper, he was there all the time on his best behavior, though with a naughty malice stirring in him and peeping out of his eyes. He ate—how he ate! Hardly a meal left remnants enough to provide for the next, and butcher's meat, which before had only been got every third day, was now brought to the house every morning. In an access of filial devotion, René had undertaken to relieve his mother of household accounts, always a plague to her, and the little blood-stained butcher's bills alarmed him by their number and the amount of money they represented. He hardly spoke to his father, avoided him, shut himself up in his bedroom, and there realized horribly that he was also avoiding his mother, that she made no protest, not even by glance or gesture, and that they were mak-

## YOUNG EARNEST

ing him feel the intruder. The change in his mother was amazing. She was three times as active, and was often for hours together without her crochet-work. She, who was accustomed for days never to leave the house, now went out every afternoon with her husband to walk in Potter's Park, or in the evening to visit the streets where they had lived, and to seek out old acquaintances. When her son was present she was discreet, and prattled reminiscently of people he had never known, or remembered only as names and remote presences. But often when he was in his room, he would hear them below talking excitedly, and his mother laughing or protesting. And he came to think of them as "they," and they seemed to have so little they cared to or could share with him.

One black night he had when, after coming in late in the afternoon, he found his mother unaided moving the heavy iron bedstead and wire mattress from George's room to her own. He gulped down his dismay, and stood on the stairs watching her. She had not heard him, and went on until suddenly she caught sight of him and jumped.

"Oh!"

"Shall I help you?"

"*It is*—too heavy for me."

"Where is—he?"

"He went out. He thought he saw old Mr. Timperley in Derby Street to-day. Of course you don't remember Mr. Timperley."

"In your room?"

She hesitated:

## SETTLING DOWN

"We—we sold the old bed, you know."

He helped her without another word. Together in silence they put George's bed up alongside her own, and in silence when it was done René left her. He went to his room and sat, staring unseeing at the five privet bushes and the old bicycle shed.

Presently she came to him and sat on his bed, and gazed at him like a mournful, shy little bird.

"You mustn't make it hard for us, René."

"I—I thought I was making it easy."

"His brothers won't see him."

"Why not?"

"They won't. They're hard people, the Fourmys. They can't forget the past. They say they won't help me any more if I let him stay, and not a penny will they leave me."

"You'll let him stay?"

"He knows it was cruel of him to leave as—as he did. But he had a lot to bear, really he did, René. He was very proud. It's his pride has been against him always, René."

"What did he do else?"

"Nothing very much. Only people talked. And he didn't get on. That was his pride too. You can do anything if only you get on. He never could work for other people. He was a clever man too. You get your cleverness from him. I'm sure it's not from me. He was always trying different things, but he couldn't get on. He did some silly things too."

"You won't tell me, then?"

"I have told you."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"What's he going to do? Go on eating and eating?"

"He'll look for work. Of course, at his age, it won't be easy."

"What's he been doing all this time?"

"He's been rich and lost it all again. He came back to England with quite a lot of money."

"He didn't think of you then."

"He lost it nearly all. Do be nice to him, René! He thinks such a lot of you. George is quite nice, and Elsie loves him already, but he thinks most of you. I've been telling him how wonderful you've been, and he says nothing must interfere with your career."

"But someone must make money."

"Only for a little. He says we could make much more with my money if it were re-invested."

René swung round.

"He's not to touch that, do you hear? You're a soft fool, mother. He's not to touch that. I'll work myself to the bone first."

"That's dear of you, René. And you will be nice to him, won't you?"

"All right, all right."

She kissed him and flitted away, and presently, to the devastation of his attempts to adopt what he considered a worldly and wise point of view of the matter, he heard her singing in her room. A loathing and disgust rushed through him. Men and women! Men and women! It was George all over again, quintessence of George, here on the very fringes of his being.



## SETTLING DOWN

No escape from it! In the little house, all but the tiniest noises could be heard from end to end of it.

His father came home late that night. He hummed as he groped upstairs and fumbled his way along the passage to the front room. The full hours of the night in towns, where huddled creatures live, poured in upon René as he lay in sleeplessness, staring, staring at the never-darkened sky.

From this torment to escape he could find no other solace than the attempt to be "nice" to his father. It was forced on him, and after the first plunge he found it not so very difficult, and there was some reward in his mother's anxious satisfaction. Both men played up to keep things lively for the woman, and the elder set himself almost desperately to make the younger laugh. At first when they were alone together Mr. Fourmy made the mistake of trying droll stories spiced and hot on his son, but he was met with a stare so blank and uncomprehending, so freezing, that he never tried them again. Then, more successfully, he drew on his own reminiscences, and practiced his not inconsiderable talent for caricature and exaggerated mimicry upon the odd characters he had known and the members of his own family. This met with encouragement from René, who was interested. From his father's chuckling monologue he learned that the Fourmys were the oddest family that ever was—Scotch, French, Dutch, Jewish, reg'lar English, in fact; Nonconformist for generations; clever, close, proud, hard, acquisitive, narrow, pious, with occasional outcrops of wickedness to leaven the lump;

## YOUNG EARNEST

shy, harsh, undemonstrative; loathing any kind of excess; clinging to the middle way, bound never to rise above respectable mediocrity; dreading anything so conspicuous as eminence; never reaching to any higher public office than a District Council or a Board of Guardians.

"Two of my brothers are Guardians," said Mr. Fourmy, "and they could predict no worse for me than that I should come to the workhouse. They know well enough that no Fourmy could ever get to prison. We can't be bad enough."

"Where did we come from?" asked René.

"Scotland, but that's a long time ago. Your great-aunt Janet's father started a tannery somewhere near Lancaster. That would be somewhere about the time of Napoleon. At least, I remember reading a little book the old gentleman wrote about a tour he made in France and Germany when the Continent was opened up after Elba and all that."

"But why are we fixed here?"

"Don't your big books tell you that?"

For once in a way René saw that his father was twitting him.

"Big books don't account for humble folk like us."

"The biggest books do, my boy." And to René's surprise and delight his father raised his voice and trolled out some verses that excited and exalted him. They were all about joy and freedom and the awfulness of losing them, but no single phrase bit into his mind to take possession of it.

"Yes," he said, "yes."

## SETTLING DOWN

"Pooh!" said his father. "If we understood that we'd none of us be here, neither rich nor poor. We get a little excited about it, at least you and I do, but we can't go any further—not far enough into our own minds, I mean—and we are left weaker for the attack of all the things that drag us down and bind us fast. A little squeeze for bread and butter, and we say it doesn't matter, but may come all in good time. I used to be rather good at poetry, could remember anything I read or heard. Can't do that now. I used to love it. The Fourmys hate it. Lord! when I had my last row with my father, when he had said his say, I let fly at him with a page and a half of Milton and wound up with Shakespeare—you know: 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds——' "

"I know," said René, though he had never read the Sonnets.

"Lord! I was a young man, I was, and I went on being young for a surprisingly long time. It seemed there wasn't anything in the world could take it from me. But it came to an end at last. How you do make me talk, to be sure! I wish you'd tell me about yourself."

That shut René up completely. There was nothing to tell, nothing that would not dwindle and shrivel up in the telling. There was such mockery in this disturbing father of his that his timid little emotions, his shy desire to think well of him, to like him, to set what he found in him against what he knew and had heard, hid away, curled up in his mind and created a horrid congestion. But his father had a certain fascination

## YOUNG EARNEST

for him, and it was a relief to get him to talk. He never did learn why the Fourmys, rich and poor, were fixed where they were in the middle-class of Thrigsby, but he did get flashes and sparks which promised elucidation, and he did begin to discover that there were worlds on worlds outside, and minds which were not afraid of thought and not wholly set on money and the good opinion of others. It was a painful mystery to him that his father's mind should lead him on so far, give him a shining promise of beauty—though beauty was the very last word that in his shyness of himself he would have used—and then by a cruel sleight of hand present him only with caricatures of Fourmys and neighbors and George.

Mr. Fourmy on his elder son is worth quoting. He said:

“George is a reg’lar Fourmy, a thorough Unitarian. They want one God. George desires to live in the worship of the one flesh.”

He seemed to like George, was often at The Nest, and when George and Elsie came to them there was tapped in the queer man a vein of ribaldry which made René, even as he laughed, blush that such things could be said before a woman.

George said of his father:

“He’s a funny damned old rotter, but you can’t help liking him.”

René had to admit that, but the increase in the weekly bills gave him many a sick moment, and though his father spent many hours away from home, there was never any talk of his finding work. Very quickly



## SETTLING DOWN

the household absorbed its new inmate and adjusted its habits, so far as was necessary, to his. Mr. Fourmy bought paints and brushes, and with these he would amuse himself all day. At half-past eight in the evening he would disappear, and often not return until the small hours of the morning. He never asked for money, and seemed always able to procure anything he wanted.

## VI

### PROFESSOR SMALLMAN

As the reader's curiosity (if he hath any) must be now awake, and hungry, we shall provide to feed it as fast as we can.

**E**XCEPT for Mrs. Fourmy few letters came to 166, and it was a great excitement for René when, a few weeks before the end of term, he came down in the morning to find a parcel waiting for him on the breakfast table. His father and mother watched him eagerly as he opened it, to find two large brown volumes, a German economic treatise translated by a Scots professor. A printed slip headed *Thrigsby Post* requested Mr. Fourmy to send a review not exceeding four hundred words in length within a week. Pride and elation moved René. His cheeks glowed, his eyes shone, he caressed the covers of the books, took them up, and turned over the leaves. It was the first sign of recognition from the world outside school and university.

"Professor Smallman said he would get me some reviewing." René could only speak in gasps. He could not take his eyes off the books, and when his father reached out his hand for them, his impulse was to hug them and keep them from him. "He said he

## PROFESSOR SMALLMAN

thought he could get me some. But I never thought of the *Post*. It's such a good paper."

"It's Liberal, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Fourmy.

"Yes. But of course I shouldn't have anything to do with that side of it." René had always been given to understand that he was a Conservative, and that only chapel people were Liberals.

He ate very little breakfast, and immediately afterward rushed upstairs, made his bed, and lay on it gloating over the precious books, picking up first one volume and then the other, hardly reading them, and beginning already to compose his review based on Professor Smallman's dislike of the translator. Then he began to wonder how much he would be paid for it—one, two, four, five guineas. The editor of the *Post* was a very rich man. Would they print his name? Presently his happiness was so intense that he could not bear not to share it, and he went downstairs. His mother had gone out. His father was in the dining-room painting. He had the lid of a cigar box and was covering it with a copy of a nude reproduced in some magazine from a picture in the Paris Salon of that year. René watched him. He worked with minute strokes of the brush, caressingly, carefully. Already he had painted several copies of the same picture.

"Why do you always paint the same thing?" asked René.

"Nothing else worth painting." Mr. Fourmy stopped, looked up at his son, winked, and hissed like a goose in a peculiar mocking laughter he affected

## YOUNG EARNEST

when he was most roguish. "She's a beauty, this one. Like to have seen the original. Women. Not much else men care about, as you'll find presently. I can sell as many of these as I care to paint. I'm going to do her smaller though, so's she can be carried in the waistcoat pocket or a letter-case. I've got a watch-maker's glass, so's I can see what I'm doing with the brush." And he took out the glass and screwed it into his eye and looked chuckling up at René. He was absurdly, childishly pleased with himself.

"Does mother know?" asked René, all his elation oozing away.

"She don't know I sell 'em. I didn't know I could myself. Never saw what's been under my nose all my life. But he's a clever man, is your father, much too clever to be a burden on his wife and family. Knock him down one day and he's up the next."

René said heavily:

"It's like the shops in the Derby Road where they sell the photographs and the dirty books."

Mr. Fourmy waved his hand airily:

"This, my boy, is art, hand-painted in oils. Put a gilt frame round it and it's quite respectable. These swine think art is a bawdy thing."

"Where do you sell them? To a shop?"

"No. To the gentlemen at the Denmark, the churchwardens and chapelgoers."

René sat dejectedly looking into the fire. At last he said:

"I wish you hadn't told me. It doesn't seem worth while doing anything."



## PROFESSOR SMALLMAN

He went back to his room, but his joy in the books had filtered away. To read through them was a heavy task which had become to him nothing but the commercial traffic of his time, knowledge, and brains for money. He had no motive for doing it but the cold necessity of somehow making a living. All day long he read and read until his eyes ached, and he sat far into the night writing and rewriting until he had produced four hundred words that looked like the sort of stuff he read in the literary columns of the newspapers.

A depressed mood of appalling skepticism seized him. His father and mother, his brother and sister-in-law, these were his world, and they were contented with a monotonous small happiness, and he was the fool to look for more. Ah! but the days in Scotland, the graciousness and the fun that those other people knew; the sweetness of waiting upon Cathleen's coming; her coming, the hours of tenderness and pure laughter, and her warm comradeship and the zest of the emotions they could rouse in each other and turn to a golden glee! But that was all done, and there was now only poverty and disgrace, and beyond, the sniggering of the men who loved nothing but women and the idea of women.

He kept back his review for three days, being fearful lest the editor should think him careless or over-eager, and he rather prided himself on his cunning in doing so. It was his first attempt to manipulate the impression he might make, and the illusion of subtle

## YOUNG EARNEST

activity it brought gave him some solace in his misery.

Other books came from the *Post*, and he wrote to thank Professor Smallman, who invited him to lunch on Sunday.

He had been twice before to the Professor's house, to the garden party which he gave annually to work off the social obligations incurred during the academic year. For Thrigsby he had a very good garden, and an old house in a neighborhood which still bore some traces of a rural character, though the regiments of little pink brick houses were bearing down on it with an alarming swiftness. His garden contained three plum trees and a pear tree, gooseberry and currant bushes, and raspberry canes.

Mrs. Fourmy had thought the Smallmans must be what she called "grand people," since they had lunch instead of dinner; but Mr. Fourmy remembered a Mr. Smallman who used to live in Kite Street and had two sons, of whom this might very well be one—a good-looking boy, neat and solemn, just a little too neat and obliging, always opening gates for old ladies and picking up handkerchiefs dropped by old gentlemen—that sort of boy. "Would call me 'Sir' the only time I ever spoke to him. I'll be bound that's the one."

It helped René a little to know for certain that the Professor had once been a boy, but Mrs. Smallman he remembered as a lady of a gentleness and kindness almost terrifying, so kind that she had a way of not

## PROFESSOR SMALLMAN

seeming to hear you when you were stuttering out some preposterously foolish remark. Everything was so easy for her; she was so sure of the strength of her position as a good hostess and the wife of a popular and important man; and there were the children, who were allowed to look down from the nursery window at the garden party. You could not talk to Mrs. Smallman long without having your eyes drawn to them, and then, if you were a sensitive person like René, you felt that this house was full of an intimacy jealous of its beauty, so that it repelled strangers. Friendliness there was, but it ended abruptly; the wife's eyes lighting on the husband, the husband's on the wife, or the eyes of both meeting and turning to the children at the window could bring it to a cruel and sudden close.

René could not explain to himself the uneasiness that came over him at the garden parties, or the dread of it that overwhelmed him as he pushed open the gate and rang the bell on that Sunday.

There was a bright green parasol in the hall table, and by it were two bowler hats. From the drawing-room came a faint buzz of chatter, and he saw that it contained the Professor and his wife; Blease, the Jewish Professor of English; M'Elroy, the great man of the University, captain of the cricket eleven, President of the Union—it would take a page to enumerate his distinctions; a little man who looked like an unsuccessful attempt to repeat the Professor; and a young lady in a bright green costume. René observed at once that the other men were wearing black boots,

## YOUNG EARNEST

and became dreadfully conscious of his own new brown pair.

"I'm so glad you could come," said Mrs. Smallman, and she introduced him to Blease.

"Seen you about," said the Jew. "Third-year man, aren't you?"

"Just beginning my third year," said René miserably.

Blease had made his remark sound friendly, and acute. Rather clever of a Professor to be able to place a man outside his own subject!

"We stand for something, you know," continued Blease. "Culture! A handful of men upholding the standard. Good for us to be kept in touch with working life. Don't you think so, M'Elroy?"

"Yes. That's where we score over Oxford and Cambridge, though they can never understand that."

Their talk was above René. He remembered Cambridge as a place of enthralling beauty, but to compare this and that was rather too sweeping for him, and he found it baffling, and to regard himself as standing for anything was entirely foreign to his temper. The talk shot to and fro above him, and he found his eyes being engaged by the bright green. The young lady was sparkling, easy, gay, a little figure of energy and charm.

"She is beautiful," said René to himself.

Then he decided that she was not beautiful. She turned her face into another light, and beauty came into it again; another turn and it vanished. A will-



## PROFESSOR SMALLMAN

o'-the-wisp, the hunting of which became an absorbing pursuit.

At lunch René sat opposite her, and hardly ever took his eyes from her face. Only when he seemed in danger of meeting her gaze did he turn away. Once he met her eyes and she smiled, seemed to be considering him gravely and very seriously in the depths of her mind, then dismissed him.

"She *is* beautiful," thought he, and from that moment she had his homage.

Presently she appealed to him:

"Mr. M'Elroy won't have it that Thrigsby is better than London. What do you say?"

"I've never been to London," replied René.

"Don't you love Thrigsby?"

"It's been my home always. I don't know that I ever thought about it."

M'Elroy said:

"One thinks about everything nowadays."

Something in the young man's tone roused René to protest.

"Oh no . . . lots of things one does without . . ."  
But he swallowed the rest. A sudden flow and ebb of emotion had left him speechless, and he felt utterly foreign to the company and to the charmed atmosphere of the household. Mrs. Smallman talked to him for a little, but he felt that she was speaking through him at her husband, so that he could not keep his face toward her, but was constantly turning toward the Professor as though the reply were to come from him, or would at any rate be worthless

## YOUNG EARNEST

without his indorsement. And always the Professor smiled with a vague friendliness that was disconcerting.

After the meal he was taken to the study, a long room with books all round the walls, ponderous books, blue books, year after year of reports of learned institutions; reproductions of Italian pictures; photographs of Mrs. Smallman on the mantelpiece, a photograph of Mrs. Smallman on the desk. René was given a large chair and a small cigar, which he began to smoke before he realized what he was doing. He rarely smoked, did not care for it, and presently he dropped the cigar into the fireplace. The Professor stood looking out of the window. Two of the children were playing under the plum-tree. The feeling of being thrust out assailed René. The Professor turned:

"Well?" he asked. "What's the trouble?"

"My father——" began René.

"Ah! Well?"

"He deserted my mother a long time ago. He came back. My brother's married."

"I see. So you're the only possible breadwinner. Any work in your father? How old is he?"

"I don't know how old he is. But work? No."

"It's bad luck, but it often happens. I've had to keep my father since he was fifty. What about your family? The name's well known in Thrigsby."

So Professor Smallman was the boy his father remembered! René gained confidence. It was something to know that his experience was not singular.

## PROFESSOR SMALLMAN

"They did help until my father came back. They won't now, and I don't want them to. They don't understand the pain of receiving charity uncharitably given. They call it ingratitude."

"They have their point of view."

"So have I mine," said René, astonished at his own boldness.

"Your work's good," said the Professor. "Tweeddale's reports of you were always excellent. As you know, I don't come in touch with men until their third year, and then only if they're good. You can take that from me. I must tell you—it wouldn't be fair not to—that one doesn't know in the least how good you are going to be. One has an uncertainty about you. In a way, that's all to the good. I like what you've written for the *Post*. So does Pigott the editor. What about journalism? Do you write easily?"

"No."

"It rather scotches that, then. Pupils? You could make a little that way, but it's drudging work when you're reading as well. I could give you two first-year men, pretty bad, both of them, and Miss Brock, the girl you met at lunch, has a young brother who can't get through the matric. That's as much as you could manage."

René had no notion how much he ought to be paid. He asked, and when he heard the amount his heart overflowed with gratitude, and he walked home with a new vigor in his stride and a prouder carriage of his head. His father and mother were out.

## YOUNG EARNEST

His news would not keep, and he went round to George, first changing his brown boots for black. He reckoned that in three terms he would be able to make nearly as much as his brother's whole income, and would have the vacations to repair any damage done to his own work. Then he would take his degree, and the whole world, all life, would open up before him.



## VII

### FLYING NEAR THE CANDLE

A man's heart may minister comfort to him in the hopes of that thing for which he yet has no ground to hope.

THE Brocks lived in Galt's Park, an elegant district shut off from the rest of Thrigsby by gates and unoccupied lodges. Here, in ease and amid gardens, dwelt families of an old-established prosperity, many Germans, Armenians, and Greeks, and some of the descendants of Thrigsby's famous men. Here also were the two hostels of the university, some schools, one co-educational seminary, the house of a painter with a great local fame, and that of the municipal organist. Good men had lived in Galt's Park, and it had once been the center of Thrigsbeian culture; but now all those who dwell in it have the air of having been left behind, and the little pink houses are menacing it, even as they menace the garden of Professor Smallman.

Through the winter René Fourmy came twice a week to coach young Kurt Brock in mathematics and French. Occasionally he was asked to stay to lunch, and then he was too sore from the discomfort of Mrs. Brock's broken English—she was a German from

## YOUNG EARNEST

Hamburg—to be able to support Miss Brock, Linda, in her efforts to make conversation. Also he was engrossed in the problem first presented to him on his original meeting with her: Was she, was she not, beautiful? Sometimes for a fortnight he would decide that she was so, and then his heart would go out to her in homage, an impersonal emotion bestowed on her as though she were a tree or a sunset. That she might be intelligent interested him not at all. Except in the case of Cathleen Bentley, where he had been surprised into an intimacy, refined and diluted with adoration, he had regarded women as existing only to receive in ignorance his shy homage.

As with the Smallmans, so here he had to give his mother a detailed report of the household and its manner of living. To her they also were “grand,” and she never tired of listening to the tale of their doings, their servants, what they had to eat and drink, what they sat on, what they wore, and whom they entertained. He reported faithfully—the rings on Mrs. Brock’s fingers, her richly-clad inelegant figure, her dog-like eyes that could never smile, her enormous appetite—whereon Mrs. Fourmy would sigh and say:

“I never was a big eater myself.”

Kurt, the boy, René liked, for he was so thoroughly convinced of his own stupidity that it was impossible to teach him anything. German only in name, he was English and Thrigsbeian in everything else, and René felt almost that he belonged to an older generation when he discovered that Kurt could not remember

## FLYING NEAR THE CANDLE

the horse-trams in the Derby Road, or a time when there were no motor-cars. Kurt possessed a motor-cycle, or it possessed him, so that almost everything else in his eyes was "bally rot." He excepted music, which, with his family, he loved German-fashion, greedily and indiscriminately. His attitude toward his sister was that of one who knows so much that he has nothing left to hope. Against his mother and sister he used to protest to René, whom he thought of as a "poor beggar" but a "good enough sort." René never saw it, but often Kurt would outmaneuver Linda in her attempts to waylay his tutor, and once he went so far as to mumble this warning:

"What I can't stand about women is the way they go nosing round."

"Do they?" asked René, looking up from *Hall and Knight*.

"My sister does. She wants to know how a man works. She's like me with a motor. Haven't you got sisters?"

"No. I wish I had."

"I don't know. Having a sister like Lin is enough to put a man off women for life."

"She has always been very charming to me."

Kurt snorted.

Another day he growled out:

"Linda says you are like Schiller. You'd better look out. She said the last young feller was like Mozart."

"I've never seen a picture of Mozart," replied René.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Silly sort of face."

That very day Linda outmaneuvered Kurt. As a rule he walked with René to the gates of Galt's Park, but now, believing his sister to be safely out of the way, and also wishing to change the tire of his motorcycle, he let René depart alone, and René was not gone above a hundred yards when he encountered Linda. He bowed, removed his hat, and was for making on, when she stopped.

"I'm glad to meet you," she said, with such a smile that René felt once and for all that she was beautiful, and was so confused by his own enthusiasm that he did not take the hand she proffered, and put her to the awkwardness of withdrawing it.

"I—I——" He looked desperately up and down the road, but could find no topic, and ended lamely by saying:

"I—I like your brother."

"Oh! Kurt! But I am glad to have met you. I hoped you would be at the Smallmans last Sunday. I was so disappointed." Her voice too was beautiful in its friendly, emphatic cadences.

"I—I wasn't asked."

"Oh, you aren't *asked*. You go. Everybody goes."

(He had never been able to identify himself with everybody, or to take everybody's doing for a reason for his own.)

She went on:

"I wanted to ask you if you would care to come and hear me play at the Goetheverein—that's the German club—next Wednesday. It's a good program;



## FLYING NEAR THE CANDLE

Schubert, Beethoven, Brahms. You'll love Beethoven."

"My mother plays, but her piano has yellow keys, and the music is faded like the keys."

"It must be beautiful to understand your mother. Professor Smallman has told me all about you, and I do hope you'll come."

"I'd like to come."

"That's settled then. We have supper at the Verein, and I'll introduce you to some people you'll like to know. It's nice to know your friends' friends, don't you think?"

René felt vaguely uneasy.

"Friends' friends," he repeated almost interrogatively.

"Friends," said Miss Brock, "are those whom you have always known you would meet." This she said with a kind of recklessness that was almost exaltation. It certainly startled René into something like emotion, into the desire to respond. For the first time during their conversation his eyes met hers full, and he was confronted with a smile so charmingly inquisitive that he was compelled to satisfy their curiosity and he jerked out:

"Yes. Friends."

And it seemed to him that she had given and he had accepted—something. Gift and acceptance were so surreptitious that the nature of them was a matter of almost complete indifference. The great thing was the giving and the accepting, and the excitement of the transaction drowned the little emotion that had stirred

## YOUNG EARNEST

in him. One more glance he stole at her, and he saw that she was satisfied, that their conversation was at an end. Yet neither could end it, and it was a relief to both when Kurt came hooting and snorting by on his motorcycle.

"Till Wednesday then," said Miss Brock.

"You—you didn't say what time."

"Oh! Eight o'clock. But you might like to come with us—call for us at half-past seven. I wish you could speak German."

"I do a little."

"Mother will like that. Good-by."

She turned and walked away. René stood rooted to the ground. At his feet he saw her handkerchief. He stooped and picked it up. He dared not run after her. He pressed the handkerchief to his lips, then angrily squeezed it up into a ball and thrust it into his trousers pocket. This done, he shook himself, threw back his head, and strode vigorously homeward. He said to himself:

"I'm damned if I read love poems to her."

He had arrived at the conclusion that but for the love poems things would never have got so maddeningly out of hand with that other maiden in Scotland.

He added:

"But she really is beautiful."

Reading a book at supper that night, he knocked a glass of beer over onto his trousers, fumbled for his handkerchief, found Linda's, mopped up the beer with it, and gave it to his mother to be washed. She washed it with her own hands that night, ironed it,

## FLYING NEAR THE CANDLE

and placed it on his dressing-table so that next morning he was confronted by the embroidered name—Linda.

On the Wednesday evening he clad himself in his best black coat, the same he had had since he was seventeen, put on a white dicky and cuffs, and punctually at 7:30 stood between the stucco pillars on either side of the Brocks' front door. The family was waiting for him in the hall. The women were muffled up in veils, and Kurt was wearing a very smart overcoat and new patent-leather boots. Behind Kurt in the darkness—for the hall was lit only by one flickering gas-jet in a ground-glass globe—stood another male figure. This advanced into the light and was revealed as M'Elroy.

"You know each other," said Linda.

Kurt cut in with:

"Of course, and Fourmy thinks he is so like Mozart."

René felt a pang of uneasiness. He turned to Linda to find her eyes resting now on M'Elroy, now on himself, with quick little darting glances that seemed to take in every detail. It exasperated him to be pitted against M'Elroy, but, the rivalry having been introduced, though unsought by himself, he rose to it, and so, he felt, did M'Elroy. By way of protest René moved nearer to Mrs. Brock, who was sitting on the bottom stair.

"Gut Abend!" he said. "Ich bin——"

"Na, Sie sprechen Deutsch? So ist's gut. Ist mir sehr lieb Deutsch zu hören."

"Aber nicht——"

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Sie sprechen sehr gut. Mein Sohn wird nie Deutsch sprechen. Im Goetheverein aber, wo man so schöne Musik——"

"Ja," interrupted René at a venture, and he found that, with these three expressions, he could get along very well and keep Mrs. Brock perfectly happy talking away as she never did when the use of English oppressed her. She never stopped. She talked him into the cab that came for them, out of it, up the stairs into the German club, and into the concert-room where she presented him to other women like herself, who nodded and smiled at his fumbled utterances—and talked.

The room was arranged like a restaurant with little tables all round it, and the platform at one end slightly raised. For the most part the audience sat in little family groups and drank beer and ate sandwiches. René found himself confined between Mrs. Brock and another stout matron, and began to feel rather oppressed and to wish he had not come. Kurt and M'Elroy had joined a band of young men who took possession of a corner and looked on at the scene with English disapproval of its Germanism. Some of them René knew for Meyers and Schoeners and Krauses of the second and third generation.

The room was soon filled with smoke, and the atmosphere became very thick, but the Germans ate and drank till their faces shone. And greedily they gulped down the music, which was beautiful and charming and sentimental by turns, though all seemed to meet with the same approval. A pale young Jew played the violin



## FLYING NEAR THE CANDLE

until René was near tears and Mrs. Brock heaved fat sighs of contentment; a portly Austrian with a sweet little tenor voice sang Schubert's Trout song so neatly and with such ease that René wriggled with pleasure; and there were quartets and a solo flute and a piano duet by two little blonde girls with pink legs and absurd pale eyes, with which they ogled their papa in the audience and the portrait of the Emperor William on the wall; and Linda played a Beethoven sonata (rather dull), and the Prelude of Rachmaninoff, which was received with thunderous applause. She wore a white dress and looked very fine, plump, and comely, with her white hands hovering over her and descending on the keys, and her head swaying until upon the close of the music it drooped to show a beautiful line from her neck to her waist. René had been so moved by the music that his eyes caught greedily at this extra pleasure, and they never moved from Linda's face as she stepped down from the platform, and came forward looking for her party. She was greeted with "Prosits" and raised tankards as she passed between the tables. Then she stopped and gazed over to the corner where Kurt was sitting. M'Elroy stood up to catch her attention. René saw that, and also how Linda shrank away from the assertion and the claim, feigned that she had not seen, and threaded her way toward her mother's table. To cover her coming, René began to talk wildly in German:

"Das war wunderschön. Ich habe nie solches Klavierspiel gehört. Ich bin——"

"Linda versteht. Ja. Aber sie fühlt nicht mehr

## YOUNG EARNEST

als——” And a torrent of long-involved sentences descended on René and brought him to a hopeless bewilderment. That had been his growing condition. This incursion into a foreign world, into an atmosphere of easy social intercourse, was for him, a dweller among the humble ingregarious inhabitants of mediocre streets, an ordeal, a fierce conflict with impressions. Already to have had so much music to absorb had put some strain upon him. The effort to follow Mrs. Brock’s conversation had been exhausting, and to save himself he clung to Linda and the idea of Linda. He rose as she came up. She stood for a moment with her hand in her mother’s, looking, for a brief space, like a Cranach Eve, all charm and tenderness, the very bloom of womanhood upon her. She took his chair, and he had to fetch another. He was forced to place it close to hers, so that he had some difficulty in not touching her. Presently she moved so that the smallest accidental gesture must make him touch her. He edged away, and she turned and looked at him searchingly, inquisitively. His face was blank as that of a statue. His mind knew no thought. He seemed to himself to be drowning in a languor that was part weariness, part excitement, at her propinquity.

She laughed, and her laughter roused him, but already she was talking animatedly to her mother and her mother’s friends, and René became absorbed in contemplating her honey-colored hair, the rounding line of her shoulder, the pretty modeling of her cheek and neck. And, through her conversation with her mother, with her white shoulders and the pretty mod-

## FLYING NEAR THE CANDLE

eling of her cheek and neck she carried on with René an intercourse more terrifyingly intimate than any he had ever known. He had a disquieting sense of using more faculties than he had ever suspected in himself. It was pleasantly adventurous, but to a youth of his virtue it savored too alarmingly of black magic that her attention should be upon him while her words were elsewhere, and that he should be so keenly aware of her. It sent the room whirling round him, made his identity, which hitherto had seemed definite enough for all the apparent purposes of life, melt and trickle away, and cruelly transferred the center of his universe from himself to Linda. And, when she looked toward him again, it was almost as though she had surprised his state, so certain did she look, but still inquisitive and malicious.

"Well? Did you talk German?"

"I said you were *wunderschön*." He leaned forward so that his hand touched her arm. He was so desperate that boldness was his only course. She had taken something from him. He was in a mood to claim it.

"Am I?" she said. "You looked as if you didn't see me."

"But I did see you all the time, especially when you drooped your head."

"Oh! Then!"

And with the acuteness of his desperation he perceived that she was aware of the effectiveness of the drooping of her head. That made him angry, though he knew not why.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"It's so hot in here," she resumed; "will you take me home? It would be nice to walk. The others will drive."

She explained to her mother, and René followed her, torn between expectancy and alarm. At the door he met M'Elroy. For a moment he was delighted to see that hero, saw in him an agent of relief.

"It's too bad, Linda," said M'Elroy; "I haven't had a word with you all evening."

"Well? There are other evenings, and we are both so young." She said this with a rather pretty German accent, the assumption of which seemed to infuriate M'Elroy, for he flung off with an angry "All right!" and left them. Linda smiled slowly to herself, and René was conscious of a doom settling on himself, and all his hope seemed to have gone with M'Elroy.

They parted to go to their respective cloakrooms, and René told himself that she would change her mind, would dismiss him also and wait for her mother, that what his eyes had seen he had not seen, that, after all, Linda desired of him nothing but the common civility of his escort. But all his attempted evasions only excited him the more, and by the time he met Linda again at the door he was speechless and in a sweat.

The night was cool, clouded, and dark. René walked very fast.

"I can't keep this up," said Linda, and he dropped to a crawl.

"That's better," she said with a sigh, as they walked down the nigh empty streets. "Oh, dear, I should be so sorry if you hadn't been happy."



## FLYING NEAR THE CANDLE

"I—I was happy. I loved the music."

"You can tell almost everything in music."

"If you have anything to tell."

"How droll you are—so literal."

"Miss Brock——" said René. They were walking very slowly now. They had turned down the last lighted street before the darkness of Galt's Park. It gaped before them, inviting, menacing, romantic, rousing him to a mood of antagonism to the growing fascination she was exercising over him.

"Droll?" he said. "I don't know. I mean what I say, though. I can't always say what I mean."

"Who can?" asked she.

"I mean, suppose you have a feeling for anything, for your father or your mother or something beautiful, and the feeling is so big that it can't get out——"

"One gets to think," said Linda in a quiet little voice, soothing, caressing, "that men don't have feelings like that."

They passed through the gates into the darkness of the Park. They walked on in silence, slower, slower, till they came to a weeping tree that hung right over the footpath. Here they stopped altogether. The blood beat at his temples, he was near choking, and there was Linda in his arms and he had kissed her, shyly, coolly, almost defiantly. It was soon over, but she lingered, and out of the darkness came her voice saying:

"But you are the drollest dear."

Stung into a passionate desire to justify his situation, he cried:

## YOUNG EARNEST

"By God, but I do love you."

A little cry from her (he scarcely heard it), a strong embrace, and there came another kiss, wherein was neither sweetness nor delight, but only a bitter hunger.

## VIII

### INTIMACY

By hunger sharply sped  
To grasp at weapons ere he learns their use.

SOON René found himself engaged upon an intimacy with Linda Brock—that is to say, he was ever at her command, her constant escort, her listener. She talked of everything, seemed to empty her mind for him. Everything she discussed—the relation of the individual to the race, the race's rights in the individual, childbirth, the upbringing of children, and the position of women. He had not her reading, and was at first fogged by her discourse, her voluble juggling with topics and ideas that could not enter his mind without engendering a certain heat and releasing some emotion. It was not long, however, before he found himself master of her jargon, not long either before she found out how to use it to bring him to a confusion from which there was no issue but by kisses and embraces, and because he kissed and embraced he loved, or believed that he loved. All his unhappiness he ascribed to their necessary separations, and he was persuaded that his soreness could be healed, his dissatisfactions repaired in a future possession. The

## YOUNG EARNEST

force of old habit kept his working life intact, and there he was happy and proud to think that in his love there should be so noble a coolness. He tried to explain this to her, and she said:

"Yes, of course. You must keep your work separate. Love and fine thinking, you know."

He liked the phrase, not knowing it for a quotation; but he never observed that she always set herself to disturb his coolness, and never let him go from her till it was drowned in a flood of warmth.

She took him in hand, made him buy clothes, gloves, spats, chose his ties for him and his shirts; discovered that he only wore one shirt a week, and tacitly informed him that two was the irreducible minimum; persuaded him to abolish the parting in his hair and to brush it back; to abandon his straight for winged collars; presented him with gaily-colored socks; lent him books, modern works of fiction and fashionable philosophy; induced him to become a member of the Union, though she could never get him to speak at debates. On her instigation he joined a tennis club in the summer term, proved rather skillful, and was invited by M'Elroy to play for the University second team.

Linda was ambitious for him, but she could not make him ambitious, and she failed to develop opinions in him; but always, just as she was despairing of him and on the point of dismissing him from her mind as dull, he would come out with some simple comment that delighted her with its directness and force. Then she would go to Professor Smallman and talk about René, and the Professor would say:



## INTIMACY

"A good sound brain. Nothing unusual except that one feels in him things unroused. No passion."

"Ah! Passion!"

"Yes," he said, purring, "I put it rather neatly, I think, the other day. The temperament of a clerk with a brain too good for that kind of work. He has a conscience."

"But do you think he will do anything?"

"He will do what he thinks right."

"Then you do agree that he is a force? I feel that so strongly about him."

Professor Smallman smiled in his charming, uninterested way.

"Not much good being a force if you are an economist. That's specialist's work. Even business would be better."

And Linda began to map out a career for René—business, the city council, Parliament, and thereafter—who knows?

René was very docile. His friendship for Linda made life more gracious, more full, and he was shedding the awkwardness that had grown on him during his two years of solitude. He was able to go to Professor Smallman's whenever he liked, and other houses had been thrown open to him.

At first he had endeavored to bring the new spirit that he had won into his life at home, but his father had become merely ribald, and in his mother the spark of feeling that had been struck out of her on his return from Scotland had died away and would not come

## YOUNG EARNEST

again. What she felt and thought she concealed with chatter, and too many of her notes were now exasperatingly echoes of her husband's. For a short while René went through an agony of shame when he felt his parents as a drag on him, and he could never return home without an acute feeling of sadness. To counteract this he used to talk to Linda of his mother as she had been before his father's return, brave, humorous, quick to see and to understand. In such talk Linda delighted, and she made him promise to introduce her to his household.

It was arranged.

"Afternoon tea, I suppose," said Mrs. Fourmy. "Thin bread and butter in the parlor."

"I think she'd like what we always have. She particularly said you weren't to make any fuss."

"But I'd like to wear my black silk. I don't often, now."

"You can wear what you like, mother. Only let us have tea as we always have it. I'm sure she'd like it better. Not sardines or tinned salmon or any of those things. They only have light tea because they have dinner afterward. It would be silly of us to pretend to be anything but what we are."

"But they'll think——"

"I don't care what they think."

Mrs. Fourmy stole a quick glance at him and said:

"No. You never do."

Her tone roused him to a hope that the old mother had come again, and he turned to her, only to see the quick light die down in her eyes and into them come the

## INTIMACY

querulous questioning expression that seemed to forbid him to pass beyond the empty words and looks she gave him. He realized then how false an idea he must have given to Linda, and he wished she were not coming.

When the day arrived, just before he went to fetch Linda he sought out his mother, and found her dressing in her room with his father lying on his bed smoking and reading.

"I'm going now," said René. "I shan't be more than half an hour."

"I don't mind betting," chuckled his father, "that you'll be more than that. There's no end to it when these women get to dressing up for each other. Look at your mother; she's been brushing her hair this half-hour past."

"I thought you were out," said René, cold with an almost hatred.

"Me? Tea-partying's my line. Always has been."

"Don't tease him," said Mrs. Fourmy. "Don't tease him."

Mr. Fourmy had his waistcoat unbuttoned, so that to René he seemed all fat stomach bulging through coarse shirting. He turned away in disgust. As he closed the door he heard his mother say:

"It isn't fair when the boy's in love."

He held the door open, and heard his father turn on the creaking bed and laugh and say:

"Love? A gawk like that? Statues are his line, not women."

## YOUNG EARNEST

Upon that René so lost himself in a sick dread that he was hardly conscious as he walked, and seemed to have been marvelously propelled from Hog Lane to Galt's Park.

Linda was ready for him in a light muslin frock and an adorable little tip-tilted hat. He had never seen her so pretty.

They decided to walk by way of Potter's Park to see the flowers. René could hardly get his words out, but he felt that he must do something to explain.

"You may be disappointed, you know. It mayn't be all that you think it is."

"Oh, but I have seen the outside of the house, and one knows what to expect. I mean, if you saw the outside of our house you'd know the inside was pretty much the same as hundreds of others. The curtains always give you away. And nearly all the houses on this side of Thrigsby are like yours. When I was at school I knew a girl who lived next door to you. And, of course, I'm excited because it is—don't you think—reassuring when you are fond of people to know that they have relations like the rest of the world."

René's shyness, the delicacy of his feelings had forced upon her the use of the phrase, "fond of each other." For all the excitement she had roused in him he had never become possessive nor made any attempt to assert a monopoly. And one evening when she had flirted with M'Elroy at the tennis club he had left her to it, apparently not at all distressed, and subsequently he visited on her none of the jealousy she had ex-



## INTIMACY

pected. With M'Elroy her relationship had become nothing but jealousy, and she preferred René's diffidence to that. And also, as she had shaped René outwardly, so inwardly she hoped to mold him to her liking. M'Elroy was too conceited for that.

"I promise you I shan't be disappointed," she said.

"I want to ask you not to mind anything my father may say. He does talk so. I hoped he would not be in."

"You dear silly, I shan't mind anything. I shall like it. I want to see how you live, and if I don't like anything it will only be the more wonderful that you are you."

He gripped her arm very tight. She laughed though he hurt her. It was the first uninvited caress he had given her.

"You are so strong," she said, and she took his arm and did not relinquish it until they came to the gate of 166.

To his dismay René found Elsie with his father and mother. She declared that she had only dropped in, but she was arrayed in her most garish best and had put on her primmest and most artificial manner, talking mincingly like a chorus girl. And she patronized Linda, swaggered over her as the married woman, chattered about her darling baby, and made the party so uncomfortable that Linda could not hold her own, and a gloom would have descended on them had not Mr. Fourmy come to the rescue and told droll stories, spiced and hot, of the doings of women in various parts of the world. He cut into Elsie's gushing stories

## YOUNG EARNEST

with the story of the marine and the admiral's French governess, and wound up:

"In Brazil the women eat men. No half measures. Eat you they do. Look to the right or the left and they knife you. What I can't make out, Miss Brock, is why any men stay in England."

Linda laughed merrily.

"Hardly complimentary to us! But you came back, you know."

"So I did, for my old age. England's an old man's country."

"You won't get me to believe that, or René either."

"Ah, but René can't see things as they are. Short-sighted René is. And George is blind; isn't he, Elsie?"

Elsie giggled. She had been wanting to giggle for some time, and the appeal to her set her off. She could not stop herself.

"Oh! Lor'!" she gasped, "you are funny, Mr. Fourmy. You ought to be in a pantomime. I never laugh like I do with you."

And once more Elsie dominated the party. René wilted. Linda drank the many cups of tea pressed on her by Mrs. Fourmy in her nervous anxiety. Conversation flagged, sputtered, and Mr. Fourmy in desperation kept Elsie giggling with familiar jokes. Linda laughed at them too, and René sank into gloom and his mother watched him anxiously.

At five o'clock Elsie gave a little scream and said she must hurry away to see that the servant (she had no servant) had made George's tea. She hurried away,

## INTIMACY

and then, relieved of the oppression of her presence, René was just beginning to hope for better things when Linda, to escape from the table, asked if she might see the picture on the easel in the corner of the room. Delighted, Mr. Fourmy turned the picture to the light. Linda bit her lip and a dimple came in her cheek.

“Not bad for an amateur,” said Mr. Fourmy. “Just the lid of a cigar-box and a little paint. I never did care about anything but the figure.”

He took the picture up and looked at it lovingly, and with pride and in a queer confidential voice that startled René and stung Mrs. Fourmy into a sudden attention, he said:

“You can understand an old man liking to do something with his hands, and it’s strange how, when I paint a little bit like that”—he pointed to the hip—“it brings back wonderful moments I have had and rare pleasures, not just in remembering, but as they were—wonderful!”

“I think so,” said Linda with unwonted simplicity, and Mr. Fourmy took her hand, stooped over it, and kissed it.

René looked at his mother, she at him, and Linda, turning to Mrs. Fourmy, smiled and said:

“I am so glad to have come, Mrs. Fourmy. René and I are such friends. We have such great hopes for him and I wanted to see you. Will you take me home, René?”

Mr. Fourmy opened the door of the room for her, hurried ahead to open the front door, and with a tre-

## YOUNG EARNEST

mendous dignity, bowed again over Linda's hand, thanked her for coming, and said:

"May life be good to you, and very amusing."

And Linda answered:

"I'd like to buy your picture, Mr. Fourmy. Will you send it to me when it is finished?"

"I would rather give it to you."

René's horror sent him flying down to the gate. It was a minute or two before Linda came. She was smiling, and Mr. Fourmy had come out on to the doorstep to watch her walk down. René saw his eyes follow her and appreciate her movements, and he became acutely, alarmingly conscious that she also was a woman. He was frightened of her as she came up to him, but he was also angry, and he let fly:

"Linda, you can't."

"Can't what?"

"You can't let my father give you his beastly picture. You didn't seem to mind. I thought you would. I thought you would. He sits all day doing those things over and over again."

"Oh, René, don't be silly. I'm older than you."

That was the first he had heard of it, and it dashed him. That a man should love, could love a woman older than himself was in flat contradiction to all his notions. He was furious. Linda went on:

"Two years older. Twenty years older in experience and knowledge. You think like a silly little boy."

In a rage he turned on his heel and left her. But at once a fierce hunger to be with her seized him, to clutch her by the arm as he had clutched her before,



## INTIMACY

and to hurt her more, to feel her soft flesh yielding under his grip. That desire was stronger than his fury, and he ran after her, and caught her up just at the gates of Potter's Park.

"I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. I do beg your pardon. I can't help it. I must be with you."

And he seized her arm and rushed her ahead for a few paces until she cried out at the hurt:

"René! René! Quiet! Not now! Wait!"

She was as excited as he, but not, like him, absorbed in her excitement. It was a delight to her.

He released her, and she led him to a seat opposite a bed of Darwin tulips, red and mauve and yellow. He sat by her side trembling, drowning in a flood of savage emotion, thinking not at all. Slowly he became aware of the tulips in front of him, and he said:

"The flowers are very pretty."

That relaxed the tension he was in, and he stretched out his legs and stared up into the sky, and presently he broke into words:

"And the summer sky is beautiful, but not so beautiful as you, and I love you."

His arms were folded on his chest, and he seemed to be hardly conscious of his words. Then in a calmer voice he said:

"I never noticed before how the sky is always changing and moving and alive. I would like to sit like this until it all grows dark and the stars come out and the glow of the lights of the town goes up into it? And, Linda, it has all become very different, hasn't it?"

She said:

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I knew it would come."

Then they laughed together, and René clapped his hand on her knee and told her she was a wonderful darling.

Linda observed then that they had begun to attract attention, and she rose and walked quickly away. He followed her slowly, thrilling to the present, seeing nothing in the world but her brave little figure in muslin with the tip-tilted hat. Her hair was golden in the sun, and her neck was white and the lines of her shoulders were lovely. René touched her lightly as he came up with her.

"We're going to be married," he said.

"Yes."

"Isn't it fun?"

Her answer struck him as amusing and he laughed. She asked:

"Is Elsie better in her own house?"

"Oh, she's a good sort, really, and George—that's my brother—George couldn't have done better."

"I have an idea from the way you speak that I shall rather like George."

"I didn't say anything to show I like him."

"No, darling." (René's heart leaped at the word.)

"No. I think you dislike him. You hate your father. He is impossible, but such a dear."

René, sensitive in his ecstasy, for the tulips and the sky and she had brought him to nothing less, felt a malice in her that scratched at his heart. But, loving her, worshiping the new radiant intimacy that had sprung up between them, he loved even her malice.

## INTIMACY

They walked home slowly, laughing over the mischances, the absurdity of the tea-party, and when they reached her house she made him come in, played to him for an hour, and sent him home drunk with love. He called it love, for he suspected not that it could have any other name. She had promised to marry him as soon as he had his degree and a position, and he was to write to her mother and make a formal proposal, since Mrs. Brock was old-fashioned enough and German enough to desire that much of formal ceremony.

## IX

### PATERFAMILIAS

The foolish man thereat woxe wondrous blith  
As if the word so spoken were half donne.

SO far René's success had come from his power to do what had been expected of him. He had done it without delight or enthusiasm but with the concentration which came from his lack of interest either in the past or the future. From the interest of others in himself he had been able to borrow a little excitement every now and then, but he could never sustain it. It was not lack of energy, mental or physical, but rather that, doing what was expected of him, he did it well enough to lead to further expectation, and this gave him a constant surprise at himself to keep his existence zestful. He was not altogether indifferent, but he could accept. He accepted that Linda loved him, and was equally prepared to accept that she loved him no longer, subject, of course, to any incidental pain he might suffer. Believing in everything that happened with no power of definition or intellectual curiosity, he could never at any given moment realize his position without reference to others, and therefore, when he found himself embroiled in this tender, dis-



## PATERFAMILIAS

turbing relationship with Linda Brock, he needed to bring it to the test of all his other relationships—with his father, his mother, his brother, M'Elroy, Kurt, and Professor and Mrs. Smallman. He could not talk about it to any of them, but he hoped to find in all some appreciation of the new wonder that had come upon him, and he desired, for his comfort, to find out what in this new development was expected of him. Here he was baffled. Everybody was either tactful or insensitive. Things inanimate had changed enormously for him. Streets, houses, trees, had taken on a new beauty, a friendliness that made room for his emotions; but people lagged distressfully, and he often had an unhappy sense of leaving them behind, or, 'as he talked and listened to them, they would dwindle. And yet, at the same time, he found them so wonderful that, in their failure to respond to his need, they seemed to him to be untrue to their own wonder. He knew not the nature of his need, but he was left subtly conscious of its being left unsatisfied. He ascribed his discomfort to his love, and called it "being in love." It gave him an insatiable desire for Linda's society, presence, contact; a harsh sensibility to her beauty; an appreciation of her physical qualities upon which he never dared to think, because it led him back in thought to the moment of her colloquy with his father when he had felt so strangely that he and his mother were not of their world. In this distress his mind could find ease in the idea of marriage. That settled the future and appointed an end to the force that urged him on so mysteriously and powerfully; but, accustomed as he was to

## YOUNG EARNEST

living humbly in the present, he needed somehow to escape the isolation into which the desire for Linda had cast him. He worked harder than he had ever done, but when he was not working, and issued from the coolness of that limited mental activity, he was visited by a craving that not even Linda could slake. He found most comfort in children and the idea of children. He would go and see Mrs. Smallman, and sit with her in the garden and silently watch Martin and Bridget playing over the meager lawn under the plum-tree. He would talk to Mrs. Smallman about indifferent things, and go sick at heart as he saw how her eyes and mind were upon the children, how little occupied with himself, and how rigidly she kept him from that mystery which he desired to comprehend. Again he would play with the children with an admirable success, so that they would admit him as one of themselves, only as he emerged from the game to be met with an applauding smile from the charming lady, which made him feel that she admired his performance but could not herself admit him. She was friendly and amiable, and would ask him to come again; and he would hear from Linda how well Mrs. Smallman thought of him—"Such a nice boy, and so fond of children"—but she kept him separate. He tried once or twice to tell Mrs. Smallman about Linda.

"She is such a clever girl," she would say. "A good musician, of course. My husband says she could take a first easily in almost any subject. I am sure she will make a good wife, just the kind of girl to make a man successful. We have often been surprised that she

## PATERFAMILIAS

has not married before, but of course she is a girl who could only live happily with a good brain. It does make such a difference."

Everything she said led back to her own bliss and exceptional fortune; and while René gave her due homage for her motherhood, her wifedom, her gracious happy home, yet he came almost to hate these things without knowing that it was because they were securely barred in. Yet he could not keep away nor refrain from his attempts to storm the citadel.

He would try through Smallman, who was even more exasperating. He seemed to divine that his pupil was groping after some reassurance of human beauty, but he would hint darkly at the difficulties of married life, generalize about the simplicity of human needs, whisper of the revelation of fatherhood, and, just as he had René sitting forward in excited anticipation of the longed-for marvel, he would double and turn aside into the discussion of economic problems, or the unsatisfactory nature of the academic life in Thrigsby. And then, with the children, René would see that Smallman could never enter into their games or their minds as thoroughly as himself.

On the whole he preferred George's gross swaggering over his paternity, and there was a sure satisfaction in watching his sister-in-law suckle her baby. But there again George and his wife took upon themselves an excessive credit for the achievement, hoarded it, invested it in everybody whom they could get to take it, seeming to use the child as a means of gaining admiration for themselves. They seemed to be incapable of

## YOUNG EARNEST

recovering from the astonishment of anything so natural happening to themselves, and they too, a little more exuberantly and less charmingly, barred René out.

"By Jove!" George would say, "there is nothing like it. It's wonderful what you can do without when you've got that. And, as I was saying to Elsie, I can't make out what swells do who have a nurse. I can't tell you how jolly glad I was when the monthly went and we could have it all to ourselves."

To René George was so horrible when he talked so, that he would forget the sentimental satisfaction he had had in the contemplation of the change wrought in the household by the advent of his nephew.

"And imagine," George said once, "that one never thinks of it. You get making love and all that. Just a bit o' fun, as likely as not, and it leads to this. By God, it's a big thing. Hark at the little beggar. I tell you, René, my heart sometimes stops with fright when a long time goes by and he doesn't howl. Oh, well, your day will come. It'll come, all right. Don't you worry!"

In desperation René led the conversation elsewhere.

And at home things were hardly better. He felt that his mother did not like Linda, though she showed no reluctance to talk of her, or indeed to praise her. Perhaps Linda had frightened her. And sometimes René would feel that his mother had a real horror of love and marriage and all but the most superficial and sentimental relations of the sexes. He would wonder how that could be reconciled with her reception of his



## PATERFAMILIAS

father or her excited business before the coming of Elsie's baby. She was often disconcertingly silent when he came home from some employment with Linda, and he learned that he must not tell her what he had been doing.

Sometimes she would begin of her own accord to talk of Linda :

"She has such eyes. She sees everything. You feel she knows every stitch of clothing you have on. And the things she wears herself— Well! But she's very pleasant and she's got a pretty smile. Girls were very different in my day."

"How were they different?" René would ask.

"I don't know. Different. I can't say. We were more patient. There were some things we didn't talk of. But, of course, she's not English. That would account for a good deal. If you weren't so set on her I should say she was making a fool of herself. Girls often do, you know, with a sort of man they've not been used to. But I will say this for you, René, you're not one not to take a girl seriously."

René looked puzzled. His mother laughed.

"Go on, you great gaby; don't tell me you don't know what you can do with those eyes of yours."

This annoyed him with its suggestion of a deliberate manipulation on his part of the springs of affection.

"Oh, mother," he said, "you've been so different since my father came back, and I'm different, and everything seems to be changing so swiftly that it is hard to tell—hard to tell where we are. We seem so far away from the old life, just you and I together."

## YOUNG EARNEST

Mrs. Fourmy looked at him and replied:

"You remind me of the times when you were a little boy and used to sit with an ashen face, very thin, with the tears rolling down your cheeks. And when I asked you what was the matter you used to say: 'I'm heavy.' You weren't like an ordinary boy. You seemed to feel things."

"I seem to feel things now," he said miserably; "but I don't know what things they are." Then, encouraged by the warm interest he felt in her, he added: "But I can't want not to feel." And, daring a stroke against the new baleful influence at work in the house, he told her of his recollection of the scene in the bedroom when she had spanked his father.

"Well now," she said, "to think of your remembering that."

"It made all the difference," said he, "all the difference in the world."

"Oh, you poor mite," cried his mother; "and you couldn't see it was in fun?"

"Fun!" He looked incredulous.

"Yes. We were very happy then."

He pounced eagerly on that.

"Happy? Were you happy? And now? And now?"

That was coming to closer quarters than she had courage for. She sank into indifference.

"We're old now," she said, and he felt that she too had barred him out. She also may have felt it, for she shifted uncomfortably and led the talk away from herself and presently to praise of his father.

## PATERFAMILIAS

"He was too clever," she said, "and I couldn't see how clever he was. I wanted him to beat his brothers in their own line, and I wanted him to love you two boys in my way instead of his. Of course I'm not clever, René, and I can't say where things got wrong. It's wonderful how he's settled down now. I never thought he would. And I want you to be nice to him, René, for my sake. Even if you're not going to be here much longer, I would like you to do that. He feels his position so."

The sting of indignation pricked René into brutality. He had made his effort to reclaim his mother from his father, and failed. He cried:

"What did he do?"

"What do men do when dullness creeps over them and they are mortified with failure?"

There was a note of vengeance in her tone, exasperation perhaps, a savage determination to set abominations before the fatuous innocence of her son. She succeeded. He was beset with horrors and a sick repulsion from his mother who could allow, accept, and seem to rejoice in such contamination.

Drearily he said:

"He's a dirty man," and upon that expression of opinion he left her.

However he did attempt to be more amiable with his father, and even went so far as to accompany him to the Denmark of an evening, and was there astonished to find how the old fellow by sheer wit and masterful presence lorded it over the company of clerks, shop-

## YOUNG EARNEST

keepers, theater musicians, agents, brokers, bagmen, school teachers, the odd characters, the small talents of the neighborhood. René noticed that Mr. Sherman plied his father with drink to keep him lively, and that there seemed no question of payment for it. Mr. Fourmy paid in talk, yarns, jests, jokes, impromptu fantasies, with sly hits at the eccentrics of the assembly. And although René hated the atmosphere, the smoke, the drink, the greedy lapping up of gross laughter, the pouncing on scraps of filth and equivocal utterances, he could not escape some admiration of his father. This grew as they left the place and Mr. Fourmy shook off his air of large geniality and took his son by the arm and asked if they might go for a walk together.

"To think," he said, "of your remembering a thing like that. And it did make a change too. You used to come running down the road to meet me when I came back from town. You stopped doing that. I noticed it once or twice, and then I gave no more heed to it. I never was much of a one to give heed to things. Can't stand things dull. Never could. I couldn't do what you're doing now, plodding away with those fat books of yours. It seems wonderful to me. I looked into one of them the other day. No. I never had the mind for it."

"Father," said René solemnly, "when I was born, what did you feel like?"

"Lord love a duck! What a question! I'd been expecting it, you know. And George was there, you know. But I'll tell you this, my lad. A child's wonderfully separate at once, and no amount of clucking



## PATERFAMILIAS

will ever make it anything else. It's got its own separate life like the rest of us. We're all separate, and it's just as well not to forget it. We're never allowed to forget it for long. I forgot it. I thought we were a nice little happy family with no individuals in it at all—except myself. And then——”

“What then?”

“Then, my son, there was a nasty mess.”

“Oh!”

“There always is a nasty mess. Marriage knocks a man to pieces and leaves him to put himself together again. Women are more brutal. They don't mind if marriage turns out to be no more than a pool of mud. Lord, Lord! a woman will bear a child almost every year of her bearing life and be no more than a little girl at the end of it, a prying, stealthy-minded little girl.”

René was enraged and shocked, but excited too, intellectually. He turned to his father and said:

“Father, I want to know, I must know, how you could come back to my mother.”

“That,” said Mr. Fourmy, “is what I am still asking myself.”

René swung round and struck his father full on the mouth, thrilled sickeningly to the impact and raised his hand to strike again. Mr. Fourmy caught him by the wrist and dragged him up so that their faces were close together, both breathing heavily:

“Steady,” whispered the older man, “steady! steady on, boy. It's the women bitching at you got into your blood. You're a good boy, a virtuous boy. Things

## YOUNG EARNEST

are hard for virtue. Listen to me. Do you hear?" René nodded. "Very well then. Life's a damn dirty business, and it grows damner and damner as time goes on. It got so damned for me that I cleared out. See?" René nodded. "I cleared out till I could see that it was damn funny. Then I came back. It was grinding me as it is grinding you."

He patted his son's arm so affectionately that René choked and the tears ran down his cheeks.

They walked on, René lurching, until his father took his arm again and led him. There was a moon over them, and as he led, Mr. Fourmy said:

"On a night like this even Thrigsby is beautiful. Lord! How I used to hate the place. But when I had seen things I came to know that it is like any other. There are good men in it and good things, and over all the same slime of meanness and fear that only very few can penetrate. We live in a world of women, boy, and we must make the best of it."

René hardly heard him, but he could feel the pressure of his hand and was glad that here, at last, was one nature that did not bar him out. It was so astonishing as to be repellent, but he was so hungry for comfort that he could not withdraw.

## X

### HONEYMOON

That God forbid that made me first your slave  
I should in thought control your times of pleasure.

MRS. BROCK granted René an interview. From the worldly standpoint it was satisfactory. No great objection to the projected alliance was made, and he learned that Linda had a fortune of her own which provided her with an income of seven hundred a year. If anything, he was distressed by the information. He did not regard money as in itself desirable. The lack of it was a nuisance to be avoided if possible, but not otherwise to be considered. The past year had led him to believe that such a lack was easily repaired. It was disturbing to the few ideas he had on the subject to think that he would not be able to satisfy any desires in his beloved which she could not herself supply. However that did not occupy him long, for he was comforted by Mrs. Brock's explaining that she had discussed the matter with her daughter—a good, sensible maiden, who admitted that there was a practical side even to romance—and they had agreed to postpone the marriage until Mr. Fourmy was settled in a profession. To make this easier, Linda had consented to

## YOUNG EARNEST

go to her relatives in Hamburg for an indefinite period, though, of course, she would go there as a betrothed.

He said:

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Brock."

He tried to say more, to remove the affair from the hard, business footing on which it had been conducted, to lead his prospective mother-in-law to give him some sign that she regarded him as a potential member of her family, but she suppressed him by saying:

"Frankly, Mr. Fourmy, I don't think it would be wise of you to marry with my daughter unless you have at least three hundred a year."

He agreed and withdrew, chilled at the heart. It seemed to end his wooing and to give him already a slight distaste for Linda. Could she really have discussed the matter so coolly with her solid mother? It was a shock to him that women from whom came such great ecstasy were not themselves all compact of that fiery essence. And seven hundred a year! That seemed more present to the mind of the mother than the girl herself. Seven hundred a year was to be sent to Germany until he had grown into three hundred a year.

However, Linda immensely enjoyed the process of parting. She began it on the Sunday, and carried it through till the Friday, when she was to sail from Hull, and she left her betrothed, sad, aching, but obstinately hopeful. On the Tuesday she said:

"You have changed my whole life. I was drifting. I was trying to take in too many things. You have made me see."



## HONEYMOON

"What?" asked René very seriously. He was anxious to know.

"Just *see*," she replied.

He was left uncomfortably in his own limited world, feeling that she had shot off into regions to which he could not follow her. He ought to have been accustomed to that by now, but he could not be. She was always hinting at the wonderful things she got out of him, but as he was never conscious of them, he could not understand her. He used to tell himself that it was her queer roundabout way of delighting in her love for him.

On the Thursday she said:

"You know, René, at such a distance we shall be able to get our ideas of each other clear. That is so necessary. We must make an effort to understand each other."

"Isn't it enough if we love each other?"

"Oh no. That only means making allowances. It isn't enough to do that. I get frightened sometimes when I think of all the people who are married, how little they understand each other."

"Then they're married without loving each other."

"I think I see what you mean," and she caught his hand and pressed it to her bosom. She had become much more demonstrative in these days of parting. He warmed to her excitement and rushed ahead:

"People who love each other are married. I've been thinking about it. If people love each other they have the wonderful mutual knowledge which is marriage. And we have that, haven't we?"

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Oh, wonderfully!"

On the Friday she wept and would not be consoled until he had consented to go to Hull with her. He had an engagement for the day, but telegraphed to cancel it and went with her. She clung to him on the boat, and caused him almost to be carried away from the pier. The gangway had to be put out for him, and he raced ashore and stood on the quay waving a pocket-handkerchief and swallowing his tears until the boat had dipped over the edge of the sea.

They wrote to each other, every day at first, then every other day. Her letters in their coolness often stabbed him, but he could not bring his into tone with hers. He poured out everything he thought and felt without calculation, and with no literary pleasure or excitement. She was only led into warm confession when some phrase lured her on. Her greatest enthusiasm was when, at the end of the Academic year, he sent her the examination lists with his name at the head, and also as having won the Robert Owen prize and a studentship of eighty pounds a year for three years.

Indeed his university career ended in a blaze of glory. Professor Smallman sent for him and assured him that on his papers he was an absolutely first-class man, and the university could not afford to lose him. Of course there was no vacancy as yet, and the teaching of economics was a miserably-paid profession, but in the meanwhile he could procure a supernumerary post on the staff of the Grammar School which would

leave him free to take up any appointment that cropped up. He could also continue his reviewing, unless he thought of going on to Oxford or Cambridge, when, of course, the school and the university would help him. For a career, a degree at one of the major universities was almost essential.

"I don't mind telling you," said the Professor, "that it is pretty much my own career over again, though there are things you can do that I never could. You've more imagination. Cambridge economics are very much alive just now. If you would care to——"

"I must make an income," said René. He was elated, but also disgruntled, suffering from a reaction. He had prepared his subject for the examination, and having succeeded, had lost interest in it. Vaguely he had so arranged his life that until this examination he would do as he was told to do, so that after it he might do things because he wanted to do them. On the whole, he rather resented the Professor's continued interference in his affairs. However, he agreed with the first plan. Cambridge meant another three years preparing for another examination, and he was Thrigsbeian enough to feel that it was not a "man's work."

He saw the Headmaster on the morning of Speech day, and was warmly thanked for the honor he had brought to the school, and was engaged to appear on the first day of the following term. Desiring to see his old form-master, Mr. Beenham, he went to his room and was surprised to find his desk empty and the boys playing cricket with a German Grammar and a ball of paper tied with string. As he left the school he asked

## YOUNG EARNEST

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## HONEYMOON

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## YOUNG EARNEST

mother futile also? And was not futility with gusto the better of the two?

He was too happy for the business of weighing up between his father and his mother, too absorbed in the glowing introspection to which he had been brought; introspection without analysis; a brooding, almost a floating over faculties in himself faintly stirring, reaching out to exercise themselves on everything within his reach. The world was very wonderful: its possibilities were endless; its treasures lay immeasurable only for the stretching out of his hand; and it was a delicious pleasure to him not to stretch out his hand, but to know that one day he need but make a gesture to have all its marvels pouring in on him. That those older than himself had but a small share of them disturbed him not at all. He had no doubt but his would be the infallible gesture, and, without conceit, during this happy time, he cherished a firm belief in his unique quality.

All his new delights were expressed in his letters to Linda in Germany. She analyzed them for him, not always accurately, but the mental process was new and exciting to him, and he began to appreciate her intellectual activity. They discussed his character at great length. He said: "I suppose I am, or have been—for I often find myself wanting to laugh nowadays—too serious." She replied: "Not too serious, my dear. It is impossible to be that in this heartless age. (Oh! What a lot you can learn about England by going abroad!) Not too serious. No. What you lack, I think, is power of observation. What you must realize

## HONEYMOON

is that things have a surface and a surface value. Of course *you* cannot be content with that value, but you must not expect surface things to have any value in the region of profound things, the region in which, poor dear, you have always lived." Faithfully he set about cultivating surface values, but he never could laugh at things that were just amusing; he never could laugh unless he were moved to laughter. He was, for instance, baffled and made sorry by the family jests which left George and Elsie exhausted by their noisy mirth.

Kurt Brock persuaded him to go with him for a tour in a side-car attached to his motor-cycle. Then did René become swollen and puffed up with the glory of the world. The exuberant boy was a tonic in himself; the speed he maintained was intoxicating; and they burst out of the long suburbs of Thrigsby into the Cheshire plain, over to the sea, the Welsh mountains, down the Severn and Wye valleys. To René, whose existence for so many years had lain only in Thrigsby and the little Scots village, it was being shot out into life. The return to Thrigsby made him miserable. Also association with Kurt had pricked the small bubble of his vanity. Kurt, so hopeless with books, was amazingly efficient with his machine, equal to every emergency, daring, inexhaustible, masterful. He had said many things which René had found disturbing and alarming. The boy had everything so cut and dried; no room in his life, it seemed, for folly, certainly none for brooding. He confessed one night, as

## YOUNG EARNEST

they sat sleepily in a public-house parlor, that he wanted to be an airman. René could not applaud the ambition.

"Hardly fair to your mother, or, suppose you were in love, to—well."

"People talk a lot of bally rot about love. They seem to think it means bagging a woman like a rabbit and shutting her up in a hutch to breed."

"Well," said René, "marriage does mean living together and a certain amount of responsibility."

"I dunno. I've never been in love, but I'm not going to either, unless I get something that goes off with a bang and lets me and her get on a bit." His mania was for getting on. When René wanted lunch, Kurt would hold out for another place "only twenty miles on."

Another night René returned to the subject of women and love, Kurt's audacities having a horrid fascination for him, and the boy said:

"I dunno, but if a woman said she loved me and wouldn't let me do what I wanted to do because she said she loved me, I should know she was a liar."

René tried to point out that life and love were not so simple as all that, but there was no turning Kurt. He had the thing worked out neatly to his own satisfaction, and he was not going to bother his head about it any more.

"Bad enough," he said, "to have a legal speed limit without having a private limit in the home."

A letter from Linda reached René at one of their stopping-places. She declared herself terrified at the



## HONEYMOON

thought of his being with her brother. "Do keep him from going more than thirty miles an hour."

At once René was on her side against Kurt and exasperated him by asking perpetually: "What are we doing now?" To which Kurt invariably replied: "Damn near fifty."

The tour ended in a river in Derbyshire. Kurt took a curly wooden bridge at thirty miles an hour, carried away the railing, and plunged René and machine into six feet of water. Kurt could not swim, and René hauled him out and screamed at him:

"You deserve to be killed! You deserve to be killed! Taking the bridge like that."

Kurt grinned:

"You don't know how funny you looked in the bath-chair toppling over. What a smash! What idiots to have a bridge like that. It's no good for anything except a push-bike. I'll get a car if the insurance people stump up."

René was really shocked at his callousness, and as they sat in blankets while their clothes were being dried, he took him to task, delivered himself of a pedagogic exhortation and ended by saying:

"Kurt! Kurt! I believe you have no feeling!"

"Nerves! What's the good of them anyway? But I'm jolly grateful to you for pulling me out. I must learn to swim. It might be jolly awkward if I tried to fly to America. Wouldn't it be grand if I was the first man to do it?"

Something in the boy's tone thrilled René and he felt a pang, a sudden, painful knowledge that he loved

## YOUNG EARNEST

Kurt, and, when he was left alone, Kurt's clothes having dried first, he was faintly uneasy, half wondering, yet not admitting the doubt to himself, whether he had really loved anybody else. Then he told himself that it was only because Kurt had treated him with his boy's frankness, and because he had not with anybody else been brought face to face with anything so terrible as death. And then he found himself in a brief dream asking if life also was not terrible, and love? And if——? But such thoughts he refused to think. Into his brooding happiness had come a new zest, and he would not waste one moment of it upon doubt, philosophic or particular.

They returned to Thrigsby by train, and René found himself committed to a lie about the accident. If the truth came out, said Kurt, his mother would not allow him to have that car.

What was there in common, thought René, between Linda and Kurt? She had not his frankness. (He was frank even in his lying.) She was subtle, given to theory. Her brother had, cut and dried, not so much a theory as a program. With Kurt René had had a robust pleasure which he had never enjoyed with Linda, and it was so far above all other pleasures that he took it for the goal to aim at, the prize to be won, when he should have broken down the barrier of sex and overcome her taste for teasing, and put an end to all those irritations which he ascribed to their ridiculous position as engaged persons, irritations that even in her letters pricked and stung him. He

## HONEYMOON

was slow to come by a thought, and when he possessed one always insisted upon its relevance to existence, while she seemed most to revel in ideas when they were most irrelevant. In their correspondence, her letters grew longer as the months passed. (After his success she had assumed "intellect" in him.) His letters became more precise and brief. He had no doubt of her. She had taken the place of the examination as the next stage in being, beyond which would lie, to borrow her phrase, the "real, real life."

So eagerly did he look forward to that illumination that things and people had lost their interest for him. The question of income was settled; the problem of his father and mother engaged him no more. They had suddenly become old to him, settled, left to grope along with their own affairs and difficulties. This made life at 166 easier. He had stood between his father and mother, and had now removed himself. His mother was more free in her chatter, his father less strained and more jovial in his talk. René had told them of his engagement and of Linda's wealth, and this, coupled with his success, had made them acquiesce in his translation to a superior sphere and even take some pride in it. For a short while he had qualms on seeing his mother let him go so lightly, but he faced the fact and did not let it obtrude upon his dreams of graciousness and freedom.

All these events had delivered him for the first enjoyment of his youth, and his thoughts were like bees in a flowering lime-tree. They were disturbed by nothing but Linda's letters. The more she teased and

## YOUNG EARNEST

flattered his "intellect," the more he dwelt upon the future when the teasing and the flattery would have ceased, and his warm satisfaction would be invigorated by the zestful sharing of married life. He made no plans and hardly considered those she threw out. She had ambitions for him. They were too fantastic to be noticed.

A silence of three weeks alarmed him. She broke it with the announcement of her return, and the expression of her desire to be married at once, and a request that he would meet her in London, for she was crossing by Flushing.

It was early spring. He obtained a day's leave of absence from school, and met her at Fenchurch Street. He saw no more of London than was to be seen as a background to her profile as they drove to Euston. She was different from the image he had formed of her during her absence, smaller, even prettier, more vivacious and effective. They kissed when they met, rather to his astonishment, for he had not the least desire to kiss her but only to consider her. She began to talk at once:

"It has done wonders for you. You look so much more confident and bigger. Your success I mean. And you really are distinguished-looking. How do you like your work?"

"I do it without—— No, I haven't thought about it."

"I wanted them to take you into the business— Brock and M'Elroy, you know. But old Mr. M'Elroy



## HONEYMOON

wouldn't hear of it. They wanted me to marry Jack M'Elroy. Perhaps I should have done it if I hadn't met you."

That did not please him at all, though it was obviously intended to do so. She went on:

"But we'll show them that we can do better on our own lines, won't we? Father used to say that commerce was sordid however honest you tried to be, and after all, it isn't work for a first-rate man, is it?"

Her insistence on his success and abilities worried him. It was not for this he had been waiting. He wanted her to tell him what had brought her to her abrupt decision to be married sooner than they had planned. He tried to lead her on to that but could bring her to no other intimacy than that of little caresses with her hands. He would not admit his disappointment, and all through the four hours' journey kept on telling himself that he was glad to see her. And indeed he was glad. Her coming brought the promised future nearer.

She gave him no time to ponder his disappointment or the hole it knocked in his brooding pleasure. They chose a house, fifty pounds a year, with a garden, in Galt's Park. He took his mother to see it, and she assumed the manner she had had in the old days for the visits of the "rich Fourmys."

A fortnight's shopping furnished the house, and he had the satisfaction of supplying the furniture for his study out of a check sent by his Aunt Janet. The trousseau took another three weeks, and Mrs. Brock,

## YOUNG EARNEST

with an eye to wedding presents, would not hear of the day being fixed until after an interval of six weeks. A miserable time. Linda seemed to think of everything but her bridegroom.

For the honeymoon the Yorkshire coast was chosen, by whom it was not very clear. René had wanted Derbyshire; Linda had proposed the Lakes, but, a fortnight before the marriage, Mrs. Smallman had appeared on the scene and taken charge, instructed them, tactfully and almost tacitly, in the correct deportment of those about to be married. She kept the couple apart, spent days and evenings with Linda, and made her keep René distracted. The Smallmans had spent their honeymoon on the Yorkshire coast; they knew of a charming little private hotel overlooking Ravenscar; theirs had been the perfect honeymoon, one which had never come to an end. So might—must—it be with René's; and so it would be if goodwill, advice, kindly glances, friendly instruction, could bring it about. The Professor expanded:

"It is wonderful when all that you have loved in a dream, as it were, materializes and is there in your hands. Only you feel so confoundedly unworthy. And then, when you are married and settled down, you get so abominably accustomed to it. No one could be more devoted than my wife and I, but we find that if we do not keep ourselves alive with outside interests, we begin to wear each other down. It isn't easy—marriage. I can say all this now, because if I don't I never shall. And, after all, you know, I like you, Fourmy. We shall work together and be good friends,

## HONEYMOON

but we lose something, you know. A certain kind of intimacy we can never have again."

This talk reminded René of the occasion when George had taken him as a small boy to the swimming baths, made him stand on the edge practicing strokes, and then pushed him into the deep end.

The night before his departure, his mother came into his room and sat on his bed and looked long at him:

"I can't bear to think of your bed empty to-morrow," she said.

"Better send it to the new house," replied he.

"I can hardly realize that you are a man and going to have a wife. It seems only the other day that you were a little boy, learning to cook in the kitchen. Do you remember? And now I suppose you'll have late dinner. It is queer. I used to be able to think of you as a boy at school, but I can never imagine you as a teacher, in a gown, too. And it's even harder to think of you——"

"You shall come and stay with us."

"Oh, I couldn't!" She looked toward the door.

"You could come without father."

"Don't be hard on your father, René."

"No. That's all over."

"I'm so glad."

She stooped over him and kissed him. Then she took his head in her hands and pressed her cheek against his, and on his forehead he felt her warm tears. She murmured:

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I've always tried to do my best."

Then she left him, and he felt the tears rising to his own eyes, and he lay in worship of the beautiful kindness of women. They seemed to hold in fee so much of life's loveliness, to be able to open to a man fair regions that else were hidden to him all his days. He was eager for the morrow's adventure.

The wedding made him feel that it was not by his own will that he was being married, but that in some fantastic way he had been brought to it by Mrs. Brock and the Smallmans and, incongruously, by his father and George, and was doing it to oblige them. The collective will of several persons was using him and Linda as pawns in an aimless game.

The ceremony took place in a very ugly Lutheran chapel, and the recited words had no meaning for his bewildered mind. George and Elsie—whom he remembered in the middle of it—had had a reason for their marriage. His own seemed purposeless—No. Did it not open up to him an unending tenderness like that given him by his mother last night? He stole a glance at Linda. She was all pride and blushes, rather breathlessly intent upon the ceremony, which seemed to have some emotional significance for her.

They had two rooms reserved for them in the little hotel. They avoided them, and preferred to be out of doors. They took food with them to escape dinner before the other visitors and walked the three miles to the top of Ravenscar. There they sat in the heather



## HONEYMOON

and gazed out seaward in silence. On the way they had talked little, except to comment on the broken sky, the color in the moors, the still shining sea, gray and green. They sat in silence, and he felt utterly alone, cut off from his old life with no new life begun. And almost angrily he thrust away the idea of the woman sitting there by his side. So charming she had been in the glamour of the future, so irrelevant she seemed now that he was thrust away with her to find or fail to find in her a life to replace that which had slipped away from him. He had prized that old life so little while it was his, but it had been familiar, his habitual garment. It had been fashioned with his growth. She had been outside it; that had been her fascination. But he was stripped of it, and he had nothing wherewith to approach her. And suddenly he saw that he was failing her, that such thoughts were a betrayal of her trust in him. After all, she too had shed her old life. He was fearful lest she should become aware of his treachery. He said:

"When I was away with Kurt——" And at once he knew that he had made a false move. The thought of Kurt filled him with the memory of the free joy he had had on that excursion, and he could not but contrast it with the mean and sickly hesitation of this. What was it? What was he afraid of? Afraid of the woman? Oh, come! Did he not love her and she him? What was there to dread in love?

She said:

"Oh, René, we didn't come away to talk of Kurt."

"No."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"We didn't come away to talk."

"No."

She came close to his side.

"René, kiss me. Say you love me."

"I love you."

But it was better to sit in silence and gaze out at the sea, gray and green.

She clung to him, caressed him, used absurd little phrases, English and German.

"I loved you," she said, "from the first moment when you came into the Smallmans' drawing-room. I was wearing green. Do you remember?"

"Green. Yes. I remember. I saw your parasol in the hall."

"And you loved me from the moment when you saw my parasol."

She laughed. That was better. It broke the heavy brooding in him that had brought him to such suspense.

The evening air chilled them, and they walked home under the stars. She clung to him and sang ditties of love and trysts and sentimental disasters. When they reached their sitting-room she came to him and placed her hand under his chin, pressed his lips with her forefinger, and then kissed him. Then she left him.

In the early hours of the morning he was out on the seashore, wandering aimlessly, nervously, dejectedly. Every now and then he threw up his head and took in a great draught of the keen morning air blowing in from the sea. That invigorated, cleansed him.

## HONEYMOON

Suddenly he crouched on the sands and hid his face in his hands, and cried within himself:

"I can't go on. I can't go back. Oh, Love, my love."

He had counted on her to open up new wonders and sweet joys, and together they had attained nothing but heat and hunger and distress.

## XI

### MATRIMONY

Hear me, auld Hangie, for a wee,  
An' let poor damnèd bodies be:  
I'm sure sma' pleasure it can gie  
    Ev'n to a deil  
To skelp and scaud poor dogs like me  
    An' hear us squeal.

**H**E returned to her. She was in dressing-gown, fresh, indolent, gay. She held out her hand to him.

"What a strange man you are! Couldn't you sleep?"

"No. I couldn't sleep.

"Poor old thing. I slept wonderfully."

Had she felt nothing? Had she no suspicion of the agony that had driven him from her side? Of the sick hope of comfort and reassurance that had brought him back to her? A faint shadow of fear had crossed her face on his entrance, but it had vanished when he spoke.

Indeed he was reassured. Her gaiety and charm disarmed him. The sun came streaming through the window upon her hair; her eyes danced; she glowed



## MATRIMONY

in her health and physical well-being. He had no other creature to whom to turn. Under the spell of her radiance he appealed to her, who had wounded him, to repair the hurt. She petted him, made much of him, denied him the relief of activity, and had him to sit with her in the heather with his head in her lap while she crooned to him of how happy she was, and how proud a wife, and how this honeymoon would never come to an end. There was a drugging beauty in her voice that soothed him and had him dwelling in a honeyed sleep. It was sweet to lie in the sun and gaze through half-closed lids at the pale sky and stifle the voices of hostility that stirred in him at her touch, at the caressing notes in her voice, at her perpetual drone of contented triumph. She allowed him silence, but then only the more keenly could he feel her presence. She would sigh out of it:

"A—a—ah! If we could stay like this forever and ever, in this quiet, lovely place filled with nothing but us two! If we could stay!"

He thought of Kurt, and his mania for moving on. She said:

"René! What do you like best in the world? I should like to give it you."

He answered:

"Peace."

"Peace? Isn't this peace?"

Anger stirred in him on that. How could she talk of peace when to him every moment throbbed with menace? He turned over on his side away from her.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Can there ever be peace," he asked, "between a man and a woman?"

"What do you mean?"

He made no reply.

"Ren! What do you mean? You sounded almost angry. Oh, I know what you mean." And she dodged aside into phrases—the war of the sexes, the difficulty of adjustment between the masculine-feminine and the feminine-masculine. He was thinking of himself and her, she of abstract entities between whom there was an hypothetical bottomless difference. She guessed that he might be bored with love-making and the honey-dew of desire, and set herself to be interesting to keep him amused. She succeeded, but not without exasperating him a little.

"I meant you and me," he said, biting out his words.

"Us? Oh, you dear silly! There never was anything so wonderful as us. We couldn't be more wonderful. Could we?"

"I dunno. But as I sit here, Lin, I can't help thinking of those damned Smallmans. They must have sat here and they must have said: 'How wonderful we are!'"

That seemed to strike home to her, to hurt her, for she cried out and jumped to her feet.

"Oh, I never thought——"

She moved quickly away and stood on top of a little hill against the sky, the wind driving back her skirts and sending them ballooning out behind her. He came up to her.

"What did you never think?"

## MATRIMONY

"That on our second day you would be satirical."

He did not know the exact meaning of the word, took it to mean the saying of what you do not precisely intend. He protested:

"I said what I felt. Mayn't I do that? I didn't think it would hurt you, really, I didn't. Linda, I——"

"Oh, you have such a heavy, stodgy mind. You always mean much more than you can say. And you don't know how uncomfortable it is."

She had always been able to make him, in flashes, interested in himself. Now her words came on him in faint illumination. He stood pondering it.

"I can't help it," he said slowly, "I'm made like that. I can't be comfortable."

Her answer seemed to him to clinch the hostility between them, to bring it, to his intense relief, out into the open.

"I know you can't," she said, "but I can, and you mustn't spoil it for me."

He was so grateful to her for this relief that he caught hold of her and cried:

"Oh, Linda, if I thought I had spoiled your happiness, I would——"

"What would you do?"

"I don't know. But I would move heaven and earth to give it back to you."

"I believe you would, and that makes me love you."

He weakened to her will, and not again during their honeymoon did he let slip in expression or gesture the

## YOUNG EARNEST

tinest hint of the storm let loose in him. Small periods of solitude he could procure at night when she had retired for her astonishingly lengthy toilette. Then in suppression of his fire and rebellion, in the effort to keep a tight control on it even within himself, he became aware of a strength, a firmness that, out of all that he had lost of youth and ease and pleasant happiness and the charm of living, emerged as gain. Yet it was not in his nature to count it up nor to hoard. He could find much to rejoice over, the splendor of the night, the keen winds, the huge waves splashing under the wind, and all he would take to his wife for her to turn into charm. And she would weave her spells round him. Her tone, her eyes, her warmth, that was so like tenderness as almost to deceive him into acquiescence, all said to him: "Forget! Forget!" But every fiber of his will was stretched in the effort to remember and gain knowledge—to remember how this thing had come about, that he should have so much and so little love for this woman, by what blindness he had come to it, and what in all his slow growth to manhood should have brought him to such sweet mockery of it. These were not his words. He was groping beyond words, beyond actions; his captured force was searching through his life to find forces to sustain it, to urge it on, to release that slow-moving stream that had brought him thus far to be chained and confined. He who had realized so little was struggling to realize himself, to find within himself the power that should break this woman in her complacent dwelling in the pleasure of their love



## MATRIMONY

and set him free and her. For he had begun dimly to perceive that she too was to be thought of, and in his effort he was gentle with her. This was hard, for against his gentleness she chafed. She wanted turbulence, upheaval, suspected not the stirring in his depths and was forever agitating the surface of his being. Once or twice she did call forth the anger, and then she reveled in her delicious fright and was so quiet as to alarm him and drive him back into his gentleness. Out of this she stirred him. It was to her only an odious sluggishness.

It was a comfort to him that he could admire her. She touched nothing but she gave it charm. She changed the Mapledom of their room to an originality of elegance. Her ingenuity and adroitness with herself were a source of amusement and amazement to him. The fun of watching a woman in all her ways! Her modesties, her coquetries, her absorption in the effect she is going to produce though it be only on an old fisherman on the quay! Her deceptions and comedies, her ruses, her choice of mood, her skill in calling forth the complementary mood in her companion! With Linda René took particular delight in her wit, her pleasantly malicious comment on the persons of their world. Sometimes she would bring out in her talk of them qualities and foibles that he had not remarked, though on her indication he was forced to admit that they were surprisingly there. Other times she seemed to shape them to fit in with a fantastic world of her own. And that would be little less amusing than her criticisms. He could admire her, but his

## YOUNG EARNEST

admiration made him feel how remote she was, how unpossessed, how little he desired possession, and how, in all things, she invited to it.

Perhaps she felt some of his uneasiness, for she said toward the end of their stay:

"I suppose a honeymoon can never be the same to a man as it is to a woman." (The hypothetical man and woman of all her arguments.) "A man must have his work."

"I've been thinking," said René, "that we never know what we want but when we have it."

"How true!" She had a way of making agreement with him a sort of flattery, than which he found little more distasteful.

And as they drove to the station she looked round at the hills and the rocky coast-line, and murmured:

"It will be something to remember. It is a pretty place."

For him it had a beauty that had stirred him like nothing else he had ever known. For him also, till now, all things had been charming, but the desolate moors, the stubborn cliffs had led him away from charm to beauty and the savage joy of living in resistance.

The return to their world shocked him. From those weeks of the profoundest emotions that had ever shaken him to come back to amiable superficial relationships left him floundering, made him, when he had collected himself, feel how utterly dependent he was upon his wife. He was committed to her, isolated

## MATRIMONY

with her. The loneliness of that day upon Ravenscar was nothing to the loneliness in the multitude.

Linda was immediately busy organizing her household, buying, buying all day long; visiting, receiving visitors; she had crowds of friends and gushing acquaintances, and they easily assimilated her husband, were interested in him as they were interested in her wall-papers, her furniture, her plans for the little garden, her gowns, her china. He used to watch eagerly, almost hungrily, for a sign that they recognized his existence apart from hers, but no sign ever came. To the women he was something belonging to dear Linda, and therefore to be admired since she was reputed to get the best of everything; to the men, hard-headed, commercial gentry, he seemed to be baffling and ominous, for they either fished nervously and falteringly for his views or left him in the silence to which their geniality reduced him.

He resumed his work at the school where he had not yet learned to disengage himself from his schoolboy's sensations—dread of the headmaster, an inclination to run along the corridors when the bell sounded, a desire to smack cheeky little boys over the head, reluctance to attend prayers in the morning. At the end of the year a vacancy occurred on the staff of the university and he was appointed to fill it.

His first tussle with Linda came with his assertion of a desire to be alone in his study when he was working. She had made a practice of settling down with him in the evening with her sewing, or some clerical work connected with one of the various committees to

## YOUNG EARNEST

which she had had herself appointed—social and rescue work, Arts and Crafts, the University Musical Society, the Thrigsby Amateur Dramatic Club, the Goethe Society, etc. She had learned to be silent, but by the plying of her needle or the scratching of her pen she disturbed and distracted him. He put up with it for some time, but at last it was too strong for him, and he protested.

“But Mrs. Smallman sits with her husband every evening.”

“He may be used to it, and she has a capacity for doing nothing which you do not share.”

“But it’s so absurd to have two fires lit in the evening.”

“I’d rather not work then, and come and sit with you.”

“But you must work. You never say anything.”

“Then I must work alone.”

“Why must you?”

“Because I can’t work any other way.”

“What is it disturbs you? I won’t do it if you’ll tell me.”

“I can’t tell you. It’s just having you there.”

“Then you— Then you— Oh, well! There’s nothing more to say if you feel like that about me.”

“Linda, don’t be silly. It isn’t about you.”

She had already fluttered out of the room and closed the door very slowly, so that its movement was the most eloquent reproach.

Followed their first period of coldness, which she ended with a flood of tears and a fierce hunger for



## MATRIMONY

possession and to be possessed by him compared with which that of their early days paled in his memory. This brought him to a misery from which he could see no escape but in the desire to appease her, and he dissembled and seemed to accept his position as a husband, one caught and bound and confined wholly to the existence of the woman he had wedded, finding no pleasure but in hers, no comradeship but in her society, no warmth but in her approbation. Thinking to please her, he said one day when they were over a year married:

"The room over the study—that would be the best for the nursery when we want one."

"But, René," she answered, after a pause, "we don't want to have children yet, do we?"

Despair seized him. He could not look at her.

"No. No. Of course, it is as you please."

She smiled awry:

"Oh, my dear, I didn't mean you to take it like that. It sounded horrid, I know. But for modern men and women, it ought to be possible——"

He could not let her finish. He hated her talk of "modern men and women," as though some change had come over human nature.

"I sometimes think," he said, "that no single word has the same meaning for the two of us. Your Love is not my Love, your Yes is not my Yes, your No is not mine."

"Oh, René, you do say some terrible things! Sometimes you frighten me. Sometimes you are just a helpless silly baby, and sometimes you seem to know

## YOUNG EARNEST

more than anybody I ever met. You are so strong, but you don't seem to know what to do with your strength, and I am terrified of you . . . Oh, I don't know what to do with you! Can't we be just happy?"

"Just happy! . . . I suppose we can."

"We have been . . . Haven't we?"

"We have been," he said, but the words in his mind were: "No more than happy."

To avoid hurting her he had abandoned the use of even that much introspective power that he had come by in Yorkshire by the sea. Now he worked, let the days run by on the wheels of habit, and gave her as good a counterfeit as he could make of what she desired.

She decided in her own mind that he was working too hard, and must be taken out of his solitude, which she ascribed to his inability to find his feet socially after being lifted out of his own class, and dumped into hers. Her brother was wanting to get rid of his first small two-cylinder car to buy a new 30-40 h.p. She made him an offer for the little car, and he closed with it and undertook to teach René to drive.

That was not a very difficult matter. Two lessons sufficed, and René was left with the car on his hands and no knowledge of its mechanism.

"But what shall I do if it breaks down?"

"It can't break down," said Kurt. "The magneto can't go wrong. If she stops, clean the sparking plug or put in a new one. It must be that or the jet."

René tried to read a book about motor-cars, but

## MATRIMONY

could not apply its technicalities to his own machine. He spent some days in and about and under the car, tracing out the principles on which it worked, and following its transmission of energy from cylinder to clutch, from clutch to gear, gear to back-axle. When he had done that he felt some confidence in driving, came to know the moods of his engine, and to take an extraordinary pleasure in handling it. Every week-end he made some excursion with Kurt or Linda, and sometimes alone. He explored the country for fifty miles round Thrigsby, and discovered to his dismay the vastness of the network of industrial towns, and, to his delight, the loveliness of the still uncontaminated country.

At first the change produced the effect Linda had desired. He had a new energy which enabled him to take the dull work of the week lightly. He seemed to have caught some of Kurt's enthusiasm together with a little of his good humor and tolerance. But these qualities he could not assume without the frankness that nourished them. Soon he was no longer deceived by the counterfeit he had evolved for his wife's satisfaction, and could not evade the fact that his excursions were desired chiefly as an escape from it. Their two habitual lives were organized effectively enough; it was when their lives met that there was insufficiency, fumbling, distrust, evasion. He could not altogether conceal from her the disgust and almost horror that he felt on being faced with the deception he had practiced on himself, and through himself on her. She saw his distress, could not altogether understand, felt that she

## YOUNG EARNEST

was giving him too many opportunities to escape from her, and in her turn began to counterfeit an interest in his enthusiasms and to insist on occupying a seat in the car whenever he went away, whether Kurt was with him or not. Kurt had an affectionate pampering way with her, a mere expedient for striking harmony between their different natures, which René as usual, taking seriously, misread as contempt. This, unknown to himself, encouraged the growth of the hatred which he had never allowed to rear its head. . . . And Linda, a little wearied by now of the part of the lover, had begun to play the part of the devoted, settled wife, to throw up round herself as bulwarks her advantages—her charming house, her ample means, her distinguished husband, a man of learning and culture in a commercial atmosphere, leisure among the unleisured. It was only an experiment on her part, but she gave it a thorough trial. When it failed she had her moments of despair. She had felt her husband's withdrawal from her, at least the removal of the deceit which covered it. She was enraged, determined to break him into submission, flung the whole force of her nature into the effort and failed again. Then, to escape boredom, she began to amuse herself with her sufferings. She would lead him on to talk in his inarticulate fashion of what he felt and then play upon his emotions and bring him back abruptly to her own charm, to realize her greater skill and agility in life, her rightness in the business of living and presenting a brave front to the world, and sometimes he would almost admit that she was right, and that, after all, since



## MATRIMONY

he could produce nothing definitely superior to her desire, he had better yield and give her those good things that, in their easy circumstances, they were privileged to enjoy—charm and excitement and pleasure. But he could not. Life had always been hard for him. He could not consent to have it easy. All that she fed on turned to bitterness in his mouth.

He tried to tell her once of the tenderness his mother had given him on the night before he had come to her, the pure joy that, but for the omen at his heart, he had taken for a foretaste of the heaven he was to enter. She said:

“She is a dear old woman, your mother.”

In the way she said it, in the purely sentimental interest she showed, he knew that all he had been talking of lay outside her world, and he remembered Kurt quoting with approval a remark some man had made:

“Linda Brock has no back to her mind.”

It became a desperate longing with him to make her feel, to rouse her to a realization of the emptiness and coldness of her crowded, brilliant life. And he longed to be able to go to her and say: “See! This is hurting me here and here, and I am aching with the pain of it.” If only she would come and show her hurt to him! His longing was often in his eyes as he looked at her, never in self-pity. He was as far from that as from judging her. She had changed him so; had so far estranged him from himself, from his little world of dreams and hopes, that in his first adoration of her, his innocent appreciation of her womanhood, he had so nearly conquered for his own.

## YOUNG EARNEST

And he began to question his everyday life. It seemed mechanical. He had been shaped for the position he filled, fitted into it so tightly that he could never move. He would be carried on forever by the machine that had caught him up as a small boy when they had marked him down in the Lower Third. (They had written to his mother: "He is a boy of whom the school will one day be proud." And she had been so elated by the words.) He had accepted the force of the machine and let it take the place of his own will. That was unpracticed. He had used it for nothing. The machine had carried him to security and given him things apparently so coveted that his brother George could not now speak to him naturally, so great was his awe of his success. It was so easy to think the thoughts required by the machine. A kind of education had been pumped into him. He had now only to pump that same kind of education into other young men. The machine was efficient, himself efficient in it. There was satisfaction in that. But all the other men with whom he worked were elusive; so many of them, under the pleasant manners of the common-room, concealed despondency, a mood of resignation that was epidemic, more virulent at one time than another. Against that, too, René was in revolt. Instinctively he felt that if he surrendered to it he would fall also to that other danger in his domestic life.

He tried to understand Linda. She was so successful. So many people liked her. Her social progress was amazing. Efficiency always gave him pleasure,

## MATRIMONY

and it was delightful to him, though he hated it, to feel her skillfully consolidating their position. She was tremendously active in all external things. It was her inward activity that he wished to understand. What were the things that satisfied that clever brain of hers? What her heart? He had long ago swept aside her pseudo-science, sociology, physiology, psychology, as external to herself, things worn as she wore clothes, very well, to be becoming and in the mode. It pleased her intellectually to talk of a hypothetical man and woman. What did that hypothetical man and woman become in art? He followed her in her reading, her music—so far as one so uninstructed could follow at all. . . . German sentimental *lieder*, colored lanterns over water, sweet flirtations, violins in the distance; a sighing for the passing of youth; a lingering over the sweets of love, with ultimately a withdrawal from love; a perfume. That was her art. In her drawing-room she had impressionist and post-impressionist drawings; in her own room she had pictures of young men and maidens in ballrooms and canoes and French boudoirs.

He could see the charm of the things she loved, always melted to them, but never without a reaction, an angry stiffening of the will.

At the same time, while his emotional interest in her faded, he found an increasing pleasure in watching her, in noting her movements as one marks a lovely animal in its cage. That, at any rate, was satisfying. She had beautiful lines, gestures that could thrill him with their grace, and he liked the skill with which she

## YOUNG EARNEST

clothed herself to give every one of her attractions free play.

It was not long before she became aware of his cold, indolent appreciation, and resented it, and plunged him back into the excitement which could make him writhe. It was then that they came into direct conflict, he clinging to his intellectual admiration for her and cool appreciation of her quality, she determined to deprive him of it.

At last she brought him to an angry, reckless violence. She chid him for it. Almost weeping in his mortification and shame, he cried:

"You talk as though marriage were just a covering up, a shelter from abominations."

"Ah!" She too was angry now. "What else is it?"

"By God!" he said. "I thought it led to love."

And again he found himself in that blind fury that had seized him on hearing his father's cynicism.

For some days they avoided each other. She made some pretext—wished to have some of the rooms papered—and went to stay with her mother.



## XII

### ESCAPE

*Ant.* Come, I'll be out of this ague,  
For to live thus is not indeed to live,  
It is a mockery and abuse of life.  
I will not henceforth serve myself by halves!  
Love all or nothing.

*Delio.* Your own virtue save you!

HE spent hours brooding, prowling in the streets, in whose dull monotony his mind had grown so undisturbedly, responding to their small gaieties and smaller excitements, but moving on in the even smoothness of their life. It seemed incredible to him that such turmoil could have come out of them, and yet that turmoil had begun even before his marriage, before he had met his wife. Was there some strangeness in himself? Of his nature he became doubtful and suspicious. Yet the habit of acceptance was too strong in him; even his misery he could accept. Very laboriously he strove to come by an idea of himself, and was only the more confused when he arrived at this:

"They won't come out to meet me, and when I go out to meet them, they run away. I cannot enjoy

## YOUNG EARNEST

their pleasures, and they seem to want nothing else. It gets worse and worse. I couldn't even talk to Elsie now. Almost anyone can make me seem ridiculous."

Linda wrote to him:

"Can't you see, Ren dear, that there are some things won't bear thinking of, and spoil with thinking. You poor, tortured thing!" (Least of all did he want pity from her.) "I know you don't really want to think, and you don't think easily, like most people. At least you seem to hate thinking without coming to a conclusion. It is something finer than obstinacy, because it isn't at all for yourself that you want—what you want. What do you want? Isn't it enough to be happy? Oh, my dear, do let us be happy! I have been crying every night. It isn't that I mind being apart; husbands and wives must be apart sometimes if their life is to be possible and decent, but I can't bear our being apart in spirit."

Then she had understood! She had seen the gulf between them. She would help him to bridge it.

He hastened to her joyfully, and caught her up in a great embrace, so that she laughed in delicious terror.

And the torment began again. She had seen, understood, nothing. She was only for teasing, wheedling, cajoling him into submission. She told him—carefully choosing her moment—that she would bear him children, and for a little while, a second or two, he was appeased. Then his excited imagination worked on that. A child would mean only another entity in the house, the empty house, where there was no love to absorb it and foster its growth; more antagonism;

## ESCAPE

more separation; his child or hers, it would not be both. He could not see at all clearly, but the idea of it had for him now something horrible. With no count of his words he said:

"I do not wish for anything that you yourself do not want."

"I want it."

"Then why talk of it?"

"A man and a woman——"

"Talk of us, woman, talk of us. God! You don't know how you spoil things with your busy mind. True things, simple things, lovely things, things that lie deep in heart and mind, there is nothing that you will not shape and mold and knead and twist into your own image, pretty, pretty, charming. Oh, the lies of it all, the lies, the lies, the lies! And you never know what you are doing. All is for your pleasure. Nothing can lead you beyond that. And everything that menaces your pleasure you draw with your busy brain into words, words."

"You don't know what you are saying."

"No."

He looked up at her with his eyes glazed and dull, his jaw trembling, his fingers rubbing over and over again upon his thumbs.

"If you have said what is true, then you must hate me."

"Yes."

He stated it as though it were a plain fact well coated over by habit, so that it could give no pain. She was tranquil, seemed to have tight control over herself.

## YOUNG EARNEST

She walked twice up and down the room. Then she turned to him and said very quietly :

"I knew a long time ago that if it ever came to a scene it would be the end. I suppose I'm not romantic enough for you. I don't know what it is. But I know enough to feel that a scene with you would be serious. Even little girls know that men must have scenes. It's a kind of love-making with them. You're different."

"Yes."

"I can't pretend that you haven't hurt me."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, I'd like to pretend. But I've changed, too. I suppose you can't marry without being changed. A woman who loses her husband looks silly. But she needn't if she doesn't feel it. You can't pretend. Neither can I. You've taught me that. We've failed where nearly everybody else fails, but we admit it. What's the good of pitching good life after bad? It's no one's business but our own. They'll talk. Let them talk."

He hardly heard what she said. He was weary of her voice droning on and on.

"If it is the end," he muttered, "then there is no more to be said."

He walked round to Professor Smallman's. He had no notion of the time. Mrs. Smallman admitted him, saw that something was wrong, showed him into the study, and left him. He stood leaning against the doorpost. The Professor was sitting in his great chair with a cigar in one hand and a glass of whisky in the other.



## ESCAPE

"Good evening," said René. "I have left my wife."

Down went the Professor's legs, round came his head out of the great chair:

"Great God!"

"I just walked round to tell you. I don't know why."

"But, my dear fellow, what on earth— Not two years."

"Is it?"

"I say. Is she? Would you like Freda to go round?"

"No. She is quite calm. It's finished. It's she who said it. It never began."

"Come, come. Sit down. You'd better sleep here to-night."

"No, thanks. I don't want to see you ever again."

"Tut, tut! My good Fourmy!"

"I mean it," said René dispassionately.

"Wait a moment."

The Professor hurried out of the room, and René could hear him in the hall talking eagerly to his wife. He was seized with a dreary impatience of these good people, with their unfailing kindness. He knew perfectly well that in a moment they would return, husband and wife, *the* husband and wife, and throw him scraps of their happiness for comfort and persuasion, while with their exchange of glances they would bar him out. No. That was intolerable. He stepped to the French window, opened it, and walked out, round the house and through the garden into the street.

## YOUNG EARNEST

Another false move checked; another false relationship ended.

He slept that night at the Denmark, lied and enjoyed lying to Mr. Sherman, saying that his wife was away and he had lost his key and could not wake the servants. He sat in his room at the Denmark feeling at peace and very confident, until his father came. Then he sat with the boon company, told them one or two stories that he was able to remember from the stock of the Common Room, told them heavily, dully, so that they gained in comicality and roused laughter. His father seemed to him rather contemptible. He enjoyed his own old jests as much as his audience, and that was displeasing to René's fastidious mood.

He walked home with his father, who was loquacious and tiresome. At last René interrupted him:

"Father, do you mind not talking while I tell you what I have to tell? I have left Linda. I can't tell you why without being unjust to her, because I can't see clearly enough. She said it was finished, and so it is. I am extraordinarily happy. I never was so happy in my life. I have, in effect, told Professor Smallman to go to hell, and I shall do the same with anybody else who tries to interfere. I don't know what I am going to do, and I don't care. It is quite clear to me that there is no room for Linda and me in the same set of people. They talk so. I have no intention of continuing the life I have been leading. Everything I have ever done, as long as I can remember, has been because someone else wanted me to do it, or because

## ESCAPE

someone else thought I could. It has been surprising and delightful, but never satisfying. George has made a better thing out of his life than I. At least he has done what he wanted to do, though you and I may not think much of it. I don't think I can see my mother. I would dearly like to, but I could not bear it. She would make me feel something, and at present I feel nothing at all. But I can remember her face against mine, and her voice saying: 'I have always tried to do my best.' Good night. Give her my love."

He turned on his heel, but his father caught him by the arm:

"Don't be a young lunatic," he said. "You can't go like that."

"I can," answered René, puzzled that anybody should deny what was actually happening. "I can. Don't you see that I *am* going?"

"Look here, I'm a bit of a queer one myself, but do you know what you are doing?"

"For the first time in my life," said René, "I know what I am doing. And I like it so immensely that I am going on doing it. You can't stop me. Nothing can stop me. You said yourself that we live in a world of women, and I want to make the best of it."

His father let go of his arm.

"Good Lord!" he said, "I've had my day, but I never was so cracked as that."

Then he acquiesced in his son's indifference, nodded his head in a light parting, and went his way.

René's thoughts were reaching out to Scotland, to

## YOUNG EARNEST

his Aunt Janet's, where he had known the best of his boyhood. He walked to a station and found the London express waiting, with little knots of people standing by the carriage doors, and porters bustling with luggage and lamps and pillows, all wearing the stealthy, excited air of importance of travelers by night. Putney was London, or near London. Why Putney? He did not know, but he wanted to go there. He bought a ticket, boarded a train as it was moving, and sat in a corner seat gazing at the lights of the towns and saying to himself: "That's Ockley," because when he had taken his first railway journey by night he had asked what the lights were, and his mother had said: "That's Ockley."



BOOK TWO

ANN PIDDUCK

. . . and make  
Strange combinations out of common things  
Like human babes in their brief innocence,  
And we will search with looks and words of love  
For hidden thoughts, each lovelier than the last.

## I

### ADVENTURE IN LONDON

Et quelle est la femme qui ne chercherait pas à vous rendre heureux !

**H**E awoke with a parched mouth and cramped limbs to find himself being shaken and to hear a voice saying :

"Hi, mate, time to wake up. Can't leave you no longer."

"Eh? Is this London?"

"Aye, and London it's been these three hours past. You came in by the five-twenty-five, and I couldn't get you to wake up, I couldn't. You're in the sidings."

René shook himself and clambered down with the red-headed railway porter, and walked with him across the rails through several coaches, back to the station.

"Been ill, mate?"

"No. Why?"

"I never see such a face. Got more than your fair share of bones in it. It was that made me leave you."

"I'm much obliged."

The big clock announced five minutes past eight.

"No luggage?" asked the porter.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"No. No luggage."

"Going to see friends?"

"No."

"You'll excuse me asking, but I don't like letting you go alone with a face like that. D'you know London?"

"No."

"You'll want breakfast."

René realized that he was hungry. The porter took him to a pull-up in a noisy street, filled with the clang of tramcars and the roar and rattle of heavy drays coming from the goods yard. They had coffee and ham and great hunks of bread.

"I never see such a sleeper," said the porter.

"I was tired, I think."

That struck the porter as a good joke. He kept on chuckling to himself and saying:

"Tired? I should think you was. Tired! He says he was tired!"

Presently he became solemn and leaned across the deal-topped table.

"I can't make you out, mate. I don't know if you're a gent or what. You're from the North. It's easy to see that. What is it? Trouble?"

"Not exactly trouble. Nothing unusual, I mean. It's been going on for a long time."

"They're not after you, then?"

"Oh, no. No one's after me."

The porter's expression showed both disappointment and relief.

"Is it far to Putney?" asked René.



## ADVENTURE IN LONDON

"It's where the boat-race is," said the porter. "I been there. An hour in a bus or train."

"I mean—to walk. I'd like to walk. To see London. I've never seen it, you know."

"It'd be Fulham Road, I fancy, though I don't know those parts well. Friends at Putney?"

"Someone I know there."

"I see. You'll be going home soon. Return ticket?"

"No. I just wanted to see London. At least, there was a train going to London."

"Ain't lost your memory, have you, mate?"

"No," said René. "No. I've lost interest in it, that's all."

"Money? Got any money?"

René thrust his hand into his pocket and produced three pounds and a few shillings.

"And no friends," said the porter to himself. "Well, you are a corker, and no mistake! Set on going to Putney, are you?" René nodded. "Well, if you want a friend, come to me." And he wrote down an address in Kentish Town which René pocketed without looking at it.

"But if I was you," said the little man, "I should go back home, I should, really. See your friends and go back home. I had a brother once who got crossed in love. Took it something crool, he did, and walked out of the house one day after breakfast and went to Canada. We sent him the money to come home, and now he's doing well in the drysalting. Good-by, mate, and good luck."

## YOUNG EARNEST

He held out a grimy paw, and René clasped it warmly. It was, he felt, a good beginning.

For some time he sat in the pull-up watching the busy trade in victuals, the burly carters, weedy clerks and boys come in and gulp down their food and drink as though the beginning of the day's work hardly left them time for their natural necessities. It was all oddly familiar and like enough to the life he had been accustomed to in the school and university among factories and warehouses. Only, as he looked out of the window, the light was different, softer and more generous. It was exciting and invited him out.

He paid the bill, returned to the station, and washed and had himself shaved. As he left the barber's shop he saw a train loading up for its journey to Thrigsby, and he stayed and watched it go out for the pleasure of feeling that he was not in it. Then he turned briskly away for the adventure of the plunge into London.

A foreign city! He could hardly understand the language spoken by the people in the streets. Within a quarter of a mile he came on a great garden with trees and grass, and down a street he could see more trees. A keen air was blowing. It was invigorating and whipped up his blood. In Thrigsby, when the air was keen it was unpleasant and devastating. The boarding-houses and private hotels in the region of the station seemed to him very lordly houses. They had wide, handsome doors that were in themselves a welcome—a welcoming and no indifferent city. It seemed to him that the people in the streets were aware of each

## ADVENTURE IN LONDON

other. At least he was aware of them, and pleased with every kind of person. So many of them were amused, so many found it good to be walking the streets, and they had some mind and energy to spare from the business of the moment. Even the people in the sordid streets through which he passed had the air of bearing their squalor good-humoredly. No one was moody or grimly silent. And there was color. He knew the color of many country-sides, but always on entering the cities he had felt as though a dirty sponge had been passed over his vision. Certain streets seemed to be filled with a dancing, colored light. He was lured on from one to another, with no thought of time or direction. Some of the great thoroughfares were so familiar from pictures that he felt at home in them, and was queerly put out when they led on to places and views of which he had no recollection. Finding himself approaching a church as well known to him as the Collegiate Church in Thrigsby, he said to himself with a sudden thrill of almost awe: "This is the Strand!" And then down a street he caught sight of water. The river! He almost ran down toward it.

The tide was up, the river at its broadest. On the other side were great platforms surmounted with tall cranes that seemed higher than the highest steeple. Beyond were towers, chimneys, domes, standing out against the sky that so delighted and refreshed him. That sky and the water in the wide sweep of the river! Friendliness and power! The river seemed to bear on its broad back the bridges, the tall buildings, the bus-

## YOUNG EARNEST

ting energy about them, the twin masses of the city built up on its flanks. And along the river with the tide came a lovely air, sweetening and restoring. That was indeed a welcome, and he felt that he had passed into another world and become its citizen. He felt no more the strain of the crisis through which he had passed. The years of unceasing labor that lay between his boyhood and this moment were wiped out. The current of his being flowed again. He was as eager as a boy, as ripe for adventure, weighed down only by the memory of the dark little house that had been his home, and that other house so full of gracious things, so empty of all that could justify their graciousness. And, like a boy, he lacked purpose. He had nothing but his fantastic desire to go to Putney, and he was reluctant to tear himself away from the fascination of the river. But the porter had said the boat-race was rowed at Putney and the river must be there also.

So he walked along the river past the Houses of Parliament. He had once made a cardboard replica of it as a child, and, remembering that, his mind was filled with other childish memories—illnesses, books, fights with George, games and exploits with other boys, next-door neighbors, the small girl at his first school who had cast a blight over his life by announcing that she was in love with him— Past the tall chimneys at Chelsea; and then, taking a wrong turning, he found himself in a desolate region, almost as desolate as any in Thrigsby but for the generous sky above it. And the two sides of little houses did not so dreadfully



## ADVENTURE IN LONDON

close in upon the street as they did in the mean quarters of the northern city. Nothing here was so cramping and destroying as there.

At length he came to Putney Bridge and crossed it into what looked like a holiday town, Southport, or Buxton, or Matlock. He asked a policeman the way to Putney.

"This is Putney."

"I want Mr. Bentley's house. It is called Rose-neath."

"Mr. Bentley. He's dead. Six months ago."

René asked to be directed to his house. The tidings he had received had made his memory of Mr. Bentley very clear—gruff, kindly, patronizing, a little pompous, conscious of being a success and "somebody." He had his name printed very large on luggage labels, and the note-paper on which Cathleen used to write was crested, with something about *Judex* on the scroll beneath the crest. And Mrs. Bentley was always tired, and her husband used to keep everybody flying round to fetch and carry for her. But they had very nice ways, and their house in Scotland was always open, even if it was overfull of athletic young men, highly polished and oppressively clean.

When he came to the house, René found it empty. He was disappointed with its aspect. It was very like the Brocks' house in Galt's Park, must have been built about the same time; stucco with absurd Gothic windows; a square porch, rooms on either side of it. He was disappointed, for he had thought of the Bentleys living in a region remote and inaccessible, beyond any-

## YOUNG EARNEST

thing he had ever known or could know. He remembered the agent's description of his own house—"an eminently desirable family residence." This house bore almost the same recommendation. The fantastic London that he had shaped in his mind began to fall away. It had something in common with Thrigsby, was connected with it by something more than the deep sleep in which he had been borne hither. He felt rather foolish standing there by the empty house, and saw with dismay how much more foolish he would have been if the house had been occupied and the Bentleys accessible. He had a sick fear as he saw how irresponsibly he had acted, and how separate his impulse had been from his will.

"All the same," he said, "it is done. It is done. I thought I should always know what would happen to me, but this I did not know. It makes it easy for Linda. The Smallmans will help her to see how badly I have behaved. They will like saying it and explaining to all their friends. They will talk about all they did for me. I never wanted them to do anything. I never wanted— If I had been like George and gone into business? But I could not have stood that, either. It would have been over sooner. Other people stand things, worse things, too. Oh, well—I can't."

It gave him no pleasure to think that he was different from other people. Rather the reverse; it brought an acute pang of something like shame. He moved on. He lost himself in the polite streets of Putney with their little gardens, but came at last to another

## ADVENTURE IN LONDON

bridge. The sun was setting, and he stood and watched it weave a changing tapestry on the sky.

"So the days go," he said. "I think I never noticed a day go before. There must have been something very wrong with me."

That lightened his heart. To have confessed his failure was already in some sort to justify it, and though the cloud upon his mind had grown darker, he was sensible of a release of feeling. He could breathe again. He was no longer the cramped, huddled creature that he had been all day. He could rejoice as the sky grew dark and the stars came out and the glow of the great city went up into the sky. There were patches in the sky so lurid that they filled him with alarm that they must mean fire. He moved toward one of those lurid patches and found himself presently in a narrow thoroughfare crowded with men and women, youths and maidens. The street was streaked with light and darkness. Cheap bazaars were thronged; shops filled with automatic machines of entertainment were garishly lit; there were butchers' and greengrocers' shops open to the air, blazing with color under electric and naphtha lamps; there were stalls in the road, barrows of artificial flowers; white kinematograph houses; terra-cotta music-halls and theaters; crimson-tiled and green-brick public-houses; swarms of human beings, talking, laughing, singing, the laughter of excited girls. He shrank within himself from the harsh vitality of it all. He was filled with a dread of calling down some of the laughter upon himself. The road grew narrower, the wheeled traffic more con-

## YOUNG EARNEST

gested; the yellow and red trams seemed to fill the street. Motor-cars, trams, carts, all moved slowly and cautiously. A little girl started to move across the road, her eyes fixed on someone or something she had seen on the other side. Another step and she would be under a motor-car. René moved to save her. At the same moment, from the other side, he saw a young woman dart out, catch the child up, fling her back, and rush on in her own impetus. She slipped in the tramline, and almost fell just within his reach. He caught her arm, pulled her up, and dragged both her and the child back to his own side of the road. The traffic moved on and no one seemed to have seen what had happened. The child saw her opportunity and dashed over in safety, leaving René and the young woman together.

"A near thing that," said he.

"I think I've hurt my foot. I slipped on the tramline. They do stick up just here."

"Can you walk?"

She tried, but twisted up her face with the pain of it.

"O-o-oh! Crimes! Let me hold on to you."

He supported her, and she found that she could just hobble.

"Rotten luck!" she said. "I was going to a dance. Don't you love dancing? Just like me, though; if there's ever any trouble going, I get it. I shall have to go home now."

"Is it far?"

"Not far. The busses go by. Any old bus from that corner." They had come to a circus where many



## ADVENTURE IN LONDON

roads meet. "Mitcham Mews. Number six. Don't you trouble. You just put me into the bus."

"But I must see you home."

"I 'spect you got someone waiting for you. 'Tain't fair to spoil your fun."

"This is much better fun than anything I can imagine doing!"

"'Tain't my idea of fun, helping a lame duck over a stile. It's good of you, anyway. Penny fare."

They boarded a bus and she leaned down and prodded at her ankle to discover where and how much it hurt.

"It's only ricked, I think," she said. "It feels like your neck when your head goes gammy. I don't think it's a sprain."

René was filled with admiration of her vivacious prettiness. She had an oval face; a dark complexion beautifully colored, ivory most delicately colored with crimson; wide-set eyes that were still merry in spite of the pain smoldering in them; a pouting mouth that, as she talked, showed perfect teeth, small and even brilliant, strong as an animal's dark hair neatly arranged under a rather common hat. She had a necklet of imitation pearls round her soft throat. Her dress was neat, but just a little shabby. She laughed lightly, and her laughter lit up her face with a radiant happiness.

"What you might call being thrown together," she said.

He could not but smile with her.

"I'm rather glad," he answered. "Do you know that I hadn't spoken to a soul but a railway porter and a policeman since early morning?"

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Reely," said she. "I think I'd die if I couldn't talk. Here's where we get off. O-o-oh!"

She hung more heavily on his arm as they descended. They stood for a moment to watch the bus jolt back into its top gear and go roaring up the wide and almost empty street.

"It's not far."

They moved slowly for some fifty yards, past empty shops, until they came to an archway plastered on either side with the bills of local music-halls, and lit with an old gas-jet. Through the archway they turned and came to a dark place, very quiet, with long low buildings on either side of it, and a great litter of paper and refuse on the pavement, and handcarts and vans uptilted. The ground floors of the buildings were all taken up with doors, the first floors with little windows, in some of which were flower-boxes and bird-cages and hanging ferns. One or two of the windows were lit up. From the other end, far up, came the glaring lights of a motor-car. It stopped, and they could hear the purr of its sweetly running engine.

"That's Mr. Ripley," said the young woman. "He's often out at night. He's a oner, he is. Down to Brighton and back and all that, you know."

René did not know, but he was pleased and excited. London had ceased to be a spectacle to him. He had been drawn into an adventure, taken to a place where people lived—and a very strange place—the friendliest of hands was on his arm, the cheeriest of voices ringing in his ears.

## II

### MITCHAM MEWS

Do not her dark eyes tell thee thou art not despised? The Heaven's messenger! All Heaven's blessings be hers.

**I**'M sorry," she said, "but you'll have to help me upstairs. Wasn't I a fool to go and get tripped up like that?—O-o-h! Hercules!"

René took her in his arms and carried her up the narrow little stairs. She opened the door and asked him to come in and have a cup of tea. After she had put the kettle on and lit the gas she sat and took a long look at him.

"I like you," she said. "And I suppose I shan't see you again. That's always the way. The people you like best you see only once, or in the train, or going by in a bus. Is it far where you live?"

"I don't know where I live."

"Go on. I'm not that sort."

"It's true. I've only just come to London. This morning."

"Leave your things at the station?"

"Things? No, I didn't bring any."

"Well! I never!"

She shrugged her amazement away, his adventures being no business of hers.

## YOUNG EARNEST

After she had made the tea she removed her shoes and stockings and examined her ankle. It was inflamed and slightly swollen. She made him rub it, giving little gasps as he touched or wrenched the soreness.

"'Tisn't a sprain? You don't think it's a sprain? I don't care as long as it isn't a sprain."

"No, I shouldn't think it's a sprain; but you'd better ask someone else."

"Are you Scotch?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"You talk funny. I say arsk."

"My home's up north."

"Home. Father and mother?"

"Well—no. A wife and all that."

"O-o-h! Married?"

She looked unhappy and uncomfortable for a moment. Then she said:

"I shouldn't have thought it. You look so young. What did you do?"

"Lectured and took pupils at the university."

"College? I know. There's a big school just round here. I suppose it's something like that. I seen the teachers. Half-baked they look, some of them. Was that it?"

"I don't know what it was. Things came to a head suddenly. I was taken by surprise. I think it will take me some time to realize quite what has happened."

She asked his name. He gave it and she hers, Ann Pidduck, and she worked in a factory, pickles and con-



## MITCHAM MEWS

diments, at the packing, putting wooden boxes together with a machine that drove in four nails at a time. Once she had been ill and sent away and taught the artificial flowers, and she did that too, in her spare time, for some hat-shops in the High Street, and for one or two ladies she knew. She used to live at home with her mother, who had turned religious and couldn't put up with a bit of fun. And she had a friend who lived in these rooms when there were still horses in the mews, but the friend had gone out to Canada on a farm, "where you get married at once if you're anything like." She broke off her story:

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you can't just sit and look at London till it begins to look at you."

"No."

"You look as if you'd like to sit there forever and ever. Oh, you do look tired, poor thing! But keep awake a little, there's a dear. I must know what I'm going to do with you."

He could hardly keep his attention fixed on what she was saying, but he fastened his eyes on her to make her understand that he was listening.

"You don't want to go home? No?"

He shook his head.

"Popped the lid on it, have you?"

He nodded.

"Got any money?"

"In a bank."

"All right. You'll want clothes and things. You

## YOUNG EARNEST

can write. Only I want to know; it's nothing I shouldn't like? Is it?"

"No."

"I don't want you to tell me, but I wouldn't like to think you'd done something you'd be sorry for. . . . You haven't drunk your tea. I say, you haven't drunk your tea. Asleep. I'm off. Good night."

And she limped away into the inner room.

When he awoke the next day he remembered that she had come to him in the morning, shaken him out of his deep sleep, and made him understand that he could have her bed, sent him staggering toward it, and then, as he sank back into unconsciousness, he remembered hearing the door slam.

She had laid breakfast for him, tea, bread and butter, and an egg lying ready to be boiled in a saucepan. He was at first petulant at her absence, but shook himself up enough to see that he was not in a position to feel any such thing, and to be amazed at his own acquiescence in the unexpected. It was somehow disreputable, this discovery of himself in a strange room after two nights spent in his clothes. He had not even removed his boots. His gratitude to Ann Pidduck was appreciably lessened as he remembered that she had not thought to take them off for him. To put a man in her bed with his boots on! That was, to say the least of it, distasteful. It was sufficiently against the grain of his physical and mental habits to send his thoughts flying back to the life he had left, but they were caught in the mists of the excitement

## MITCHAM MEWS

and pain through which he had passed, and he relapsed into an insensate pondering, forgot his breakfast, his surroundings, and sat unheeding through the day, until Ann returned in the evening. She brought flowers.

"Well, of all the——" she cried. "I did think you'd have cleared away. Why, you haven't touched your breakfast. Haven't you been out?"

He had not exactly forgotten her. Indeed, he had been awaiting her coming, but now he was puzzled because her return was so expected, and it ought to have been unexpected. He felt injured, that he had been cheated, that things on this side of his crisis were too much like things on the other side: a woman, habit, meals, interest in his appetite.

"Wake up, stoopid," said Ann. "You'll be wasting off like the niggers in Africa if you don't wake up. You can't go sleeping on forever."

"Can't I?"

"Well, you can, of course, but if you do, I'll be thinking you're a case. You're not a case, are you? You weren't last night."

She spoke as though to be called a case was the horriest of insults, and he took it as such and roused himself not to deserve it.

"That's better," she said. "Nothing to eat all day."

"No. Nothing."

She pondered that.

"I expect your stomach knows best. Now, then, stir yourself. You got to write home."

She gave him writing materials and he drew up to the table and sat staring at the blank sheet of paper.

## YOUNG EARNEST

He took pen in hand, but could not write, could not concentrate his will even that much.

"What am I to say?" he asked.

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Well, I'm blowed! If you aren't the funniest. . . . It's to your wife! Don't you know what to say to your wife?"

He wrote:

"Dear Linda——"

Then he thought of Linda in a friendly, distant fashion, as someone charming and taking whom he had known, of whom it was pleasant to think.

"Dear Linda, Linda Brock, Lin——"

Ann saw his hesitation, and suggested:

"You want your clothes."

He wrote down:

"I want my clothes. I don't think I want my books. You can sell the car. You gave me a nice picture once by some German. I think I should like you to send that. I have been walking about London. It is very wonderful. A railway porter was nice to me, and there are other friendly people."

He stopped. Ann said:

"The address is 6 Mitcham Mews, West Kensington."

He wrote that down. There was something else he wanted to say, but he could not fix in his mind a sufficient image of Linda to be able to write to her. So he gave it up presently and only added: "That's all," and his signature.



## MITCHAM MEWS

The letter was addressed and stamped, and Ann, still limping, took it to the post.

When she returned, she said:

"I've fixed you up. You're to sleep with Jimmy at No. 10 until your things come, and then we'll begin to think. You're not much use to anybody now, are you?"

"No," said he. Then he began to stammer out an apology.

"Silly," said Ann. "Just a lost boy, that's what you are. Lucky for you it was me and not the police found you. They'd have sent you back where you came from." She saw that it was useless to joke with René and soon dropped her bantering tone. She took him for a walk round the houses, and was delighted when he remembered that he must have a clean collar and a toothbrush; a return to grace, or sense.

"Oh! I'd be sorry now if it wasn't true, and you went back."

"I shan't go back."

Her question, the necessity of responding to her spontaneity, brought back in a sudden flood his will, and he had a quick pleasure in feeling the air upon his face and seeing the evening color of the streets.

"No. I shan't go back. People can't go back. But my father went back."

"Why did you say that?"

"What did I say?"

"'But my father went back.'"

"Did I? I didn't know I said that. I didn't know I even thought of him."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I know," said Ann. "It's like suddenly finding yourself talking aloud. And don't you feel a fool if there's anybody listening?"

They bought collar, toothbrush, pajamas, and a red sausage for supper. With these they returned to Mitcham Mews and had to wait up until Jimmy at No. 10 turned up. He did so about one o'clock, a strange figure strutting up the mews, beaming all over his face, and humming:

Can you see me, gray eyes,  
Hiding in the tree,  
Waiting for the moonrise?  
Gray eyes, look at me,  
In the apple-tree.  
Apple-tree, apple-tree.

He had on a mortar-board cap, a white collar reaching up to his ears, an enormous black bow tie, a red satin waistcoat hung with chains, and his face was blacked except for one eye and a quarter of an inch all round his mouth. He carried a banjo. As he saw Ann he drew his hand across the strings and croaked out in a hoarse voice:

"Give us a kiss, old dear, I'm that hellish dry."

"Oh, go on. You got to behave yourself now, Jimmy, now you got a lodger."

"Like old times," said Jimmy. "Ma had lodgers. What Ma didn't know about lodgers——"

"Give it a rest," said Ann. "Do keep off the comic for a bit. Mr. Fourmy wants to get to bed. So do I, and you'll have the neighbors up, the way voices go ringing up the mews. Good night."

## MITCHAM MEWS

She turned away.

"Good night, old gal," said Jimmy, and he led René up the stairs of No. 10. "Good sort, that gal. Likes her bit o' fun same as any gal, but she's a tiddler, she is. Independent! I don't fink. Gals look arter themselves nowadays. Cos why? Cos they're three to one. We don't go round, us men. What a awful thought! There's your bed, Mr. — What's your name? 'Ardly a gent's bed, but you can lie on it, and what more can be said of any bed?"

He went into the inner room and began undressing, talking all the while, explaining that minstrelsy was only one of his professions, that he had had a rotten day, not a smile in the world; that he wouldn't try again for a week, not if he starved; that Mr. Fourmy must be prepared for a shock when he saw him without his black, as it made such a difference, and that there was a silver lining to every cloud. He got into bed without removing his black, for René heard no sound of water, and talked himself to sleep. . . . René lay sleepless, this third night of his adventure, and rejoiced as one who had awakened from a long and painful dream. Jimmy amused him, Ann amused him, and all amusement was new to him.

Jimmy woke up talking, ran out in nightshirt and trousers, and returned with a jug of beer and a loaf of bread. That was breakfast. He sat on René's bed and they consumed their fare together.

"Gardening to-day," said Jimmy. "Ladies all want their gardens dug up these days. I got two or three

## YOUNG EARNEST

gardens. They call me Gardener, though I ain't no blooming gardener. 'D'you think sweet peas will do in the smoke, gardener?' they say. I dunno, but I sticks 'em all in. They gets it all out of a book, and what's good enough for them is good enough for me. Gardener! Well, here's luck!"

And René said: "Here's luck!"

When he was washed, Jimmy appeared as a sandy-haired man with a fuchsia-colored face, fattish, shapeless, with little twinkling, blinking eyes. Round and ball-like his head was, round and ball-like his body, and he bounced in all his movements. He was grotesque, but not so grotesque as the idea René had of him, the idea which haunted him as he sat alone in the scantily-furnished room, with no desire to go out or to claim with the world any relationship but those which chance had thrown his way, with Ann and the minstrel-gardener. He spent many hours gazing out of the window at the children playing in the litter and adding to it. There were swarms of children; little girls in charge of babies, not so very much smaller than themselves; boys tirelessly passing from one game to another, stopping only when a car came up the mews or was brought out to be sluiced down or oiled. There were one or two men who sat all day as listless as himself. They smoked, chewed straws, occasionally talked, disappeared at intervals round the corner, but returned to smoke, chew straws, and talk occasionally. They were unconcerned, inattentive, and unmoved. René saw one of them earn a coin of some sort by holding a tool for a chauffeur while he groped in his



## MITCHAM MEWS

engine. There were women who sat in the windows for hours together, gazing out with unseeing eyes; other women who stood in the doors and talked. One young woman in the evening came and stood in a doorway with a baby in her arms. The light had grown very soft. It fell upon her, and surrounded her with an atmosphere that gave her beauty. René's eyes rested on her gladly, but without conscious appreciation. Then, very slowly, he began to see something that appealed to him and accounted for her fascination: the line of her body drooping under the weight of the child in her arms, her whole body one unconscious, comforting caress of protection. While she stood there René saw nothing else, and he watched her until the light faded and she disappeared, slipped away like a vision, into the darkness. Somehow he felt that his day had not been in vain.

Ann came to inspect his quarters and to take him out. He was very happy to see her, and she seemed to feel it, for she said:

"I knew you'd be better to-day. A good night's rest. That's what you wanted. But I was afraid Jimmy would keep you up with his nonsense."

"He made me laugh," said René.

She gave a little crow of pleasure:

"Good old Jimmy!" she cried.

Then she asked him had he seen anyone that day, and he described some of the people he had seen. As he described she told histories, so that presently for René Mitcham Mews seemed a place bursting with human energy, passions, disasters, jokes, follies, and

## YOUNG EARNEST

frailties—just the sort of place he had been seeking. There was Old Lunt, who sold ballads and wrote letters for the people who had never learned to write; there was Maggie, who went out as a midwife to keep the families of her two daughters; Bellfield the furniture-remover, who had a strange young man come to see him sometimes, who was like no one else in the world; Mr. Martin, who used to keep the livery at the end of the mews and had now gone in for taxicabs; Fat Bessie, who went out charring and had an idiot son to whom her whole life was devoted; Billy and Click, who were wrong 'uns, dirty wrong 'uns, but too clever to be caught, though they would be one day.

"A bright lot," said Ann. "And then, of course, there's me—and you. They'll laugh at you at first. They laugh at everything and everybody new. But you mustn't mind that. They'll borrow money from you, but don't you never lend them more than sixpence, if it's Maggie or Bessie; twopence if it's any of the men."

"And who," asked René, "is the girl with the baby?"

"Oh, that's Rita. Baby? She's got four, and another coming. She's all right. Bit washed out with it. Makes her stupid and sly. But she's all right, and Joe's a good sort. One o' them as is always in and out of work. I dunno why. I think he's the sort as can't work with a beast above him. 'Lectrician. If you want a feller to talk, he's the one."

"I think your talk's about as good as I could have, Ann."

## MITCHAM MEWS

Her face lighted up.

"Is it? I *am* glad. Ooh! It is nice to have you call me that. D'you know, I couldn't stop thinking of you all day long. And it didn't stop me working neither. I did best day I've done for a long time."

"And all day long I looked out of the window."

### III

#### MR. MARTIN

The innocencie that is in me is a kinde of simple-plaine innocencie without yigor or art.

THE next morning brought a letter from Professor Smallman:

"MY DEAR FOURMY,—My first impulse was to come down and implore you to return, to think of your career, or, if you are incapable of doing that, of us, to whom your career and, I may say, your happiness, are things of some moment. Linda forbade me to do that. She is well, but shows signs of strain. Frankly, I can understand neither of you. Bitterness, grievances keep men and women apart, but neither of these is in her. She alarms me. She seems to me to be grappling with an emotional situation with her intellect. That seems to me to be dangerous. She said of you: 'His intellect only comes into play when he is emotionally sure,' and gave me that, which I do not pretend to understand, as a reason for letting you go your way. I cannot do that without protest. She says: 'Men and women have the right to adjust their own difficulties and repair their own mistakes without reference to outside opinion, or, indeed, outside affection.' I cannot agree. My feeling is all against it. When a man and woman marry, they create a social entity which they are not entitled to destroy without consulting society. That is putting it at its very lowest, with-



## MR. MARTIN

out thinking for a moment of the spiritual entity which marriage creates. You two seem to have agreed to disregard that——”

René read no more. The old exasperation that the well-meaning Smallman had roused in him surged through him now, and he took pen and paper and wrote:

“MY DEAR, GOOD, KINDLY IDIOT,—When no spiritual entity is created, then no social entity is created; nothing is created but an amorphous relationship which is hostile to society, and such relationships it is the duty of decent people to avoid and to destroy. Nothing is created, and if by good luck the calamity of having children is averted, then there is nothing to destroy; then those who are apart in fact are better also apart in appearance.”

So, with a startling suddenness he was driven to a conclusion, and knew that, come what might, he would abide by it. What Smallman had said of Linda strengthened him, gave him a clearer idea of her than he had ever had, an idea, moreover, in which with heart and mind he could rejoice. There was fight in her, too.

He took up the Professor's letter once more. It was rather a good letter, ably setting out everything to be considered, the various interests that would be injured—relations, friends, the university, the little community of cultured persons who would be delivered up to coarse, commercial Thrigsby and its tongues. Clearly Smallman's dread was lest all these interests should be drawn down in the wreck of the young couple's mar-

## YOUNG EARNEST

riage, and René could shudder and sympathize at the suffering and distress he might be causing. His resolution weakened a little until he thought of Linda, and then he said:

"But we are saving ourselves. The marriage goes to hell or we do. They can't have both."

Smallman's letter ended with a sentence worth the whole of the rest. It was as though he had written himself into something near imaginative perception and true friendship:

"But, my dear fellow, if you are resolved to continue in this blind and cruel folly, I can only pray and hope that the tragic trial it must be may make a man of you. Though you may be lost to us, I will pray, I believe in you enough to think, that you will not be altogether lost."

René tore up his first indignant note, and wrote another, saying how much he appreciated the friendship and affection, how it had become impossible to turn back, and how it pleased him to know that between himself and those who had been his friends there would be the separation of circumstance, not that of enmity and bitterness.

This done, he posted his reply and wired to his bank in Thrigsby to find out how much money he possessed.

He received the answer later when he was with Ann at tea: Fifty-five pounds.

"Je-rusalem!" she cried.

"I spent very little," he explained, "and my wife had seven hundred a year."

## MR. MARTIN

"Seven hundred!" She was scared. "Seven hundred! And you chucked that to come and live in Mitcham Mews! Well, no wonder they say the world's going balmy."

She was both relieved and awed by his vast wealth, and allowed him to take her to a music-hall, where her pleasure brimmed over so that he could share it.

The fifty-five pounds changed her attitude toward him somewhat, made her more sure of him, relieved her, perhaps, of anxiety. She lost the nervous discomfort that had shown itself in deference toward him, and she could now consider him as a practical proposition and no longer as the delightful but alarming perplexity he had been. She had time to breathe, to let things go their own way, until it became necessary to do something. She asked him questions about his old life to discover any talent or capacity that might be turned to account.

"If the worst comes to the worst," she said, "I could teach you the paper flowers. You could do a lot in the daytime, and I'm sure we could sell most of them."

He was quite prepared to make paper flowers. He was so fascinated by her capacity for the rough business of living and for extracting enjoyment out of almost everything she touched, that he was her admiring pupil, to be and do anything she might expect.

At the music-hall a comedian had made the audience scream with laughter by his antic burlesque of a mo-

## YOUNG EARNEST

torist. René was amused, but never smiled. Ann turned to him in some distress and said:

"Don't you think it's funny?"

She had laughed till the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"It's quite funny, but so old-fashioned. Cars don't break down like that now. I have driven hundreds of miles and never been stopped on the road."

"Oh, did you drive a car?"

"Yes. A little one."

"Then we'll go and see Mr. Martin."

And with this suggestion also he complied.

At the other end the mews were approached by a wide street flanked by little houses which were let off in flats and rooms; two flats of four rooms in each house. Mr. Martin lived in the last house, had always lived there since the houses were built, because it was next to his livery stables and convenient, for he had so much flesh to carry that he carried it as little as possible. He rose early in the morning and rolled into the glass office in his yard, where there were still two horses, a victoria, and a closed carriage, which he kept, partly because he could not bear to be without a horse, and partly because he still had some small business with old ladies and gentlemen of his former connection who disliked motors, or could not conceive of ceremonious visiting except in a horse-drawn vehicle. Besides, he had three taxicabs, and had drifted into a trade in accessories and sundries with the chauffeurs in the mews, the nearest garage being half a mile away



## MR. MARTIN

and beyond their walking distance. He knew everyone in the mews, and everyone liked him, and as he sat in his office all day long he had a succession of visitors. A groom and a boy composed his staff, and the boy was mostly away on errands for Mr. Martin's housekeeping, because he would not admit any woman to his house. Such cleaning as it got was done by the groom. Not that Martin disliked women; he was fond of them, but he was afraid of them.

"Let 'em set foot in your house," he used to say, "and they'll stay. Once let 'em start doing for you and they do for you altogether."

(He had been married to an extraordinarily capable woman and could not endure a sloven.)

Ann he had known since she was a child, when he had caught her in bravado stealing a horseshoe "for luck" out of his yard. And he had carried her and her booty into his house to show his wife the little girl who was braver than the boys who had egged her on to do it; for the boys had scuttled away on his approach. Then his wife had tied the horseshoe up with a pink ribbon and sent proud Ann away with it and a halfpenny, and permission to visit the yard whenever she liked. And when Mrs. Martin died and for a whole week the fat man sat in his house and mourned, Ann was the first to visit him and bring him out of the lethargy that had come upon him. Later, when the livery business went into a galloping consumption, it was in talk with Ann that Mr. Martin plucked up his energy to use his yard, of which he possessed the freehold, for a taxicab business.

## YOUNG EARNEST

She had told him about René, who received a warm welcome when she took him into the office one evening. The very geniality of his reception made René shy, and the old fellow put him to such a shrewd scrutiny that he felt he was being weighed up and measured in his worthiness of friendship with Ann.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," wheezed Mr. Martin. "Any friend of hers is a friend of mine." Then he came to business. He knew nothing of motor-cars himself, but the cab business needed likely young fellers, different kind of feller from 'orses; they needed 'ands and a heart to understand, something special, an inborn gift. "Lookin' at you, I should say you didn't 'ave it. But motors, well, that's a thing you can learn. A motor can't take a dislike to you same as a 'orse, and, likewise, a motor can't take a fancy to you and work 'is 'eart out for you, same as a 'orse. I've 'ad 'orses, if you'll believe me, as it's been a honor to drive, and I've never 'ad a 'orse as could abide Mrs. Martin, God bless 'er! It was a great grief to me, that was."

René had been primed with the wonders of Mrs. Martin and Ann had told him the story of the horseshoe, and he was able to sympathize and show his sympathy. He set his case before Mr. Martin.

"'Tain't many men," said the livery-keeper, "as turns from books to work. 'Tain't many as can. I seen many a good man go wrong through books—discontented, uppish, faddy, nothin' good enough. But they was mostly too old or middle-aged. When a man gets idees, there's nothin' to be done with him.

## MR. MARTIN

That's my experience, and I been sitting here these forty years. But perhaps you're young enough."

"Young enough to try, anyhow," said René, and that brought the old man back to the affair of the moment. He had a new car on order, and when it arrived it would be given to Casey, and then René could have Casey's machine, a Renault. In the meantime, it would be necessary for him to study up the knowledge of London preparatory to taking out his license. Casey would tell him all about that, and if he liked he could come into the office and help with the books and the accessories and earn fifteen shillings a week. He closed with that, and arranged to begin the next day, coming very early in the morning so that he could meet Casey."

"I do hope you'll like it," said Ann, as they walked away.

"I'm sure I shall," said he. "I like the old fellow, and I must do something, and that's better than blacking my face and gardening."

She laughed.

"It does seem queer, after all your book-learning."

"When I look back on it, my dear Ann, I can only remember reading one book with pleasure after I was a child and did everything with pleasure."

"What book was that?"

"It was an anthology. Something like this was in it:

'And there shall be for thee all soft delight  
That shadowy thought can win,  
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,  
To let the warm love in.'"

## YOUNG EARNEST

"That's pretty," said Ann Pidduck. "There are pretty things in books, though I never read them."

Said he:

"I never had the feeling of it until now. I think something went wrong with me that I couldn't feel."

"But you must have, to suffer like you did and run away."

"I'm beginning to think that I ran away because I couldn't feel, but only melt into a sort of exasperated heat."

"But that's like when you lie awake when you're very young and fancy no one wants you, and simply long for someone to want you very much. Oh, you do make me go on."

"I'm glad you do, Ann. I'm glad you do."

"I dunno——" she seemed to protest.

"You must let me say that because I never had such a friend as you."

"Oh! Oh! The world seems all upside down. I oughtn't to. I oughtn't to be friends, because you *are* different. You know you are. It isn't the same. It isn't like having a bit o' fun, and since you came, I'm off my bit o' fun."

He caught her hands, and in the confused emotion that had seized him, tried to kiss her; but she broke away and ran up the mews, leaving him standing under the lamp in the archway. He did not move. He was filled with a sweet, healing tenderness that soothed his trouble and made him feel curiously and happily sure of himself, and his mind flew back to the book from which he had quoted, and to all the associations it had



## MR. MARTIN

brought in its train. And he had lost the uncomfortable sense of a violent change in his life, and began to perceive the inevitability of good and bad, hope and despond, driving him on to adventure and through adventure to appreciation of the mere fact of living, so that the things that happened were almost without significance. No longer did he have any dread of his fate; up or down, it was no great matter; a certain kind of agony it was impossible, it was vile and degrading to bear; a certain kind of happiness it was worth any suffering, any bewilderment to find. And yet happiness was hardly the word for it. Happiness was associated in his mind with being content, settled down, established, a part of surrounding circumstances, without reaction. This that he was beginning to perceive necessitated effort and will, fierce endeavor without ceasing. For an image of it he could find nothing better than tearing about the country with Kurt. Only that was aimless, containing nothing but the pleasure of the moment and the risk of disaster. The conception germinating in his mind had all the swiftness and the peril, but it had also immense purpose, irresistible force, and he said aloud:

"Force! Huge force, gripping you, holding you, bearing you on to its purpose which is also your own, so that always you are sure, always stronger than yourself."

Out of the dark archway came a voice, saying:

"A philosopher in the slums."

René started, and groped back to the world of the senses. A tall thin figure loomed up in front of him,

## YOUNG EARNEST

and a pale, eager face with a jutting nose and large eyes smiled at him.

"Kilner, my name," said the owner of it. "I've noticed you, walking about in a hungry dream. Down on your luck? So am I. Best of luck in a way. When the world doesn't want you, it gives you time to look at it and think about it, and discover that it is really good. Otherwise you have to take so much on hearsay, and then of course you are not entitled to have an opinion about it, much less any feeling."

"I was just beginning to feel extraordinarily happy about it all, though I have come to grief, and am a source of great anxiety to my friends."

"Friends? They never want anything but one's external comfort. They will dine with you, walk with you, talk with you, sleep with you, but think with you, feel with you, they will not. It's not their fault. They don't want to be anything but charming. We who want charm only with truth find ourselves in trouble in no time at all. What did you try to do?"

"I got married."

"Oh! Is that all? I thought you must be a painter or a writer or—I'm a painter. But I can't sell a damn thing, so I work for a furniture-dealer until I've saved enough to keep me going for a few months. Come up and talk."

They went up to No. 16. Kilner produced cigarettes and continued:

"I'd have bet any amount you were an out-of-work writer, or a young man slung out of a respectable house for reading poetry in church. You don't look

## MR. MARTIN

like the sort of fool who gets messed up by women, though almost any man is that kind of fool."

René tried to protest against that, and to point out that he had been married and therefore serious in his folly, if folly it were. Kilner only grunted at him.

"H'm!" he said. "Looks as if you'd been in the habit of taking things seriously simply because they happened to yourself. That's idiotic. Most things that happen are dirty little jokes, opportunities fumbled because one isn't fit to handle them, or situations forced out of greed or conceit, or injured vanity, or mere pigheadedness. There are divine things happen: doing a good bit of drawing is one of them, finding a friend is another, falling in love is another. Those things happen simply because you can't help doing them, because you'd die one of many deaths if you didn't. Once you've done one of those things, nothing else matters. You have something in you that you must keep alive. Let the others make the world hideous and vulgar and untidy. It is not your affair. If they won't or can't love what you love, then they are not for you and you are not for them. Don't you think?"

René could find nothing to say. He found it so absorbing to watch Kilner, to listen to his monologue delivered in a voice of wonderful sweetness that seemed always to be trembling into laughter. The zest, the humor of the man thrilled through him, and made him feel that all his life was full of promise, rich and ripe with romance.

Kilner began to tell him about painting and painters,

## YOUNG EARNEST

about Rembrandt and Van Eyck and Cranach, happy Cranach who could paint women without being either sensual or sentimental, and Dürer and Holbein and della Francesca, and how he himself, the son of a mason in Buckinghamshire, had always painted, at first without taste and without purpose, from sheer delight in objects, their form and their color, and how little by little he had learned to see the beauty shining through them and to wish to have that beauty also shining through his pictures and drawings. And how he had come to London to learn his art, financed by rich people near his home; and how he had assumed that every man who touched brush and paint had also desired to render the shining beauty that used all things for its dwelling-place; and how incidentally he had suffered from arrogance and blown vanity, though never losing sight of his one object; and how he had been taught a certain kind of drawing, to be accurate in imitation, and then again accurate and again accurate; and how he had quarreled with those of his teachers who had wished him not to use the power of accuracy they taught him, but to regard it as in itself an end; quarreled with his fellow-students, with his patrons, with his family, with exhibiting societies, with—apparently—everybody, because he could not learn to keep his opinions to himself or conceive that men who painted vilely with constant sacrifice of beauty to their desire to please, did so because that was how they saw things and how they liked things and loved them so far as they could love at all. And he told René of many love affairs he had had, some casual, some un-



## MR. MARTIN

happy and desperate, some light-hearted and gay, and one ecstatic though it had lasted only for five weeks in spring. He described with a vivid power how he and she lay in the grass in Richmond Park and the soft air above them was alive with light, quivering up to the blue where the clouds swam and slowly faded out of form and being and other clouds came; and near them was an almond-tree in blossom, and above them shone the gummy buds of the beeches; crisp to the touch was the grass, moist and cool was the earth. And he touched her white arm and she trembled. He trembled too. And she turned her face toward him with a sweet trouble and wonder in her eyes and they kissed.

"That ended in tears, my tears and hers. I was too coarse for her, I think; too violent. She was very delicate and beautiful."

After a long silence, René said:

"I have had nothing in my life but foolishness."

"There's no harm in that," said Kilner. "It's bitterness that kills. When shall I see you again?"

"Do you want to?" René was startled into asking.

"Of course. I don't let a friend slip when I've found one."

And gladly René said:

"A friend. I begin work to-morrow at old Martin's."

"There's a man," answered Kilner. "I must paint his heavy, happy face. It's the kind of face there won't be again. The world's changing. Man wants but little here below? Never again. We want all there is."

## IV

### LEARNING A TRADE

'Tis my vocation, 'tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation.

FOR some weeks our adventurer divided his time between working in Mr. Martin's yard and office, studying the map of London, and being driven about the city in a car of instruction with seven or eight other aspirants to the taxi-driving profession. Most of them were depressed and bored, smoked incessantly, and spoke little, but every now and then René would find one to talk to him and take pity on his gentility and give him advice and consolation. The drives would begin cheerfully enough, often with excitement and humor, but soon listlessness would creep over the party, the more sober individuals would produce maps and notebooks, while the younger would conceitedly assume that their knowledge could not be enlarged, or perhaps they were ashamed to be caught out in ignorance. On the whole, they made René unhappy, for most of them were drifting so helplessly and with such dull indifference. By contrast the energy, the power, and richness of London streets were almost appalling.

He would return home exhausted and confused, and,

## LEARNING A TRADE

to avoid thought, would go on with his map, taking Hyde Park Corner, Oxford Circus, and the Bank as the centers of three circles into which he had divided the city of his future operations. He found it easy to memorize the thoroughfares that connected them and their dependent roads. He had observed that certain districts were devoid of cabs or cab-ranks, and marking these districts off on his map, he concentrated upon the rest. The cabs served to connect one moneyed region with another, and with the stations and places of business and pleasure. And he selected the moneyed district where he would begin when he had his cab.

Casey was a Liverpool Irishman who had begun life as a clerk in a shipping office and had then, at twenty-seven, revolted and gone out to South Africa to work in the mines until one of his lungs gave out. Then he came home and had a nasty time in London in an office until he was told by a doctor that he must find some outdoor occupation. With the little money he had left, he had learned how to drive and repair a car, had been with one of the big companies for some time; then married a niece of old Martin's and thought he could do better by working for him on a profit-sharing basis. That was René's arrangement; he was given the alternative of buying his car on the hire-purchase system and using the yard as a garage, but on Casey's advice chose the first proposition. Casey said it was better, because you needed capital to stand the heavy wear and tear of a car in constant use in London traffic. That settled, Casey took his novice out in the

## YOUNG EARNEST

early morning to satisfy himself that the car would not suffer at his hands. He was delighted with the way the machine was handled. René, too, was pleased. He had been rather nervous at the thought of driving a more powerful engine than that to which he had been accustomed; but the greater power was only an added pleasure and no difficulty.

He took out his license and received a number and a number-plate, joined the union, bought a thick green suit that buttoned up to his neck, shiny leggings, and a peaked cap; a waterproof overall, enormous gloves, a leather purse, a rug. Then on a day early in the autumn he drove his car out of the mews and plunged into the eastward stream of traffic. He had not gone above a hundred yards when he was hailed by a gentleman in tail-coat and top-hat carrying a red brief-bag. Drawing up by the curb, he flung back his arm and opened the door as he had seen drivers do, and received the one word: Temple.

Absurdly hoping that he would be seen by no one who knew him, and feeling that the eyes of the occupant of the car were boring into the back of his neck, he drove to the Temple, and there received more exact directions from the gentleman, who poked his head out of the window, until they stopped outside a doorway with steps covered with the leaves of a plane-tree. The gentleman got out:

"You forgot to put down your flag."

René started and blushed. So he had!

"The fare's half a crown."

"Thank you, . . . sir."



## LEARNING A TRADE

He was given two and nine. His first tip! Three-pence.

It was a busy day. He had only half an hour to wait on the stand which he had chosen for his headquarters. He drove home at night worn out and sleepy.

The excitement did not last. Very soon he hardly noticed his fares; a stick or an umbrella raised in the street, a whistle blown by a servant, and off he sped, shipped his freight, and discharged it uninterested. From his district in the morning the gentlemen went to their business; later in the day their ladies went to the shops; in the evening both went about their pleasures. Occasionally he was taken out to the suburbs, far west or north, but for the most part it was routine work, varied in the evenings, sometimes, with the conveyance of brilliantly-attired young men and women from a restaurant to a theater in the West End, or of dubious couples to dubious habitations.

And he was happy. The monotony was a relief. It never ceased to be a source of pride to him to keep the paint and brass of his car gleaming and his engine sweet and in tune. Always it was a delight to him at night, when the traffic was abated, to let the throttle open and send the car spinning and humming over the shining streets. If he lost interest in his fares, he never weakened in his joy in the streets with their color and activity, as changing as the sky or as the water in the river, their music swelling through the day, to almost every hour its individual harmony, a music growing and falling with the seasons: vigor

## YOUNG EARNEST

and hope in October; in the winter a humorous desperation out of which grew miraculously the spring, and that again was lost in the maddening rout of June and then the slackness and the excited pleasure-hunting of the summer months when the genius of the city flees before the horde of aliens and visitors who come to gape and peer and see the sights. He was happy, and most of all he loved his independence, to be free of organization of any kind. Company? The car was company. He and it worked together. Here was no uncertainty, no fumbling. The day's work was marked out and must be well done. There was always satisfaction in it and never compromise, never the sense of being driven on by some obscure and undirected energy other than his own that had so often overcome him in Thrigsby. And because his mind and body were engaged in the discipline of skilled work, his intellect, his imagination began to grow, to reach out, to desire to use their powers upon all that he observed and thought and felt. A little joy grew in him slowly and brought him at first to a dreaming, wistful mood wherein desires expanded of which he did not begin to be conscious until spring airs stirred in London.

Through the winter the habit of labor and his pride in it brought him slowly nearer to understanding of Ann Pidduck and her absorption in fun. He began to share her pleasure in relaxation. She taught him to dance, and they attended shilling balls together and she communicated to him her Cockney pleasure in the streets, the prowling in the lighted thoroughfares, the making of chance acquaintances, the full gusto of

## LEARNING A TRADE

broad jests. He introduced her to Kilner and tried to make her include him in their intimacy and their jaunts; but she seemed to be scared of the artist, and when René appeared with him would make excuses of other engagements.

Then there were evenings of talk with Kilner, René hardly listening to him but rejoicing in the vigor of his words. He was painting in his spare time and on Saturdays and Sundays, and through his pictures and the painter's enthusiasm for things seen René learned to use his eyes. That was a slow process, too. Often he saw beautiful things and creatures that so moved him that he lost sight of them, and dwelt only in the emotion they had roused, falsifying his vision. He would constantly be overcome in that way when he tried to describe anything he had seen to his friend, who would then turn upon him and call him a bloody liar, and a sentimentalist, and a filthy spitter upon the world's beauty, a crapulous cheat, trying to steal a winged joy and turn it into a selfish pleasure; and much more that was beyond René except that he would feel ashamed but also invigorated by being so fiercely flung back into humility. Kilner took him to the National Gallery and very carefully explained the difference between a real picture and a fraud. There were, according to him, very few real pictures. He talked René into a very pretty bewilderment from which his hours with Ann were a welcome relief. There everything was what it seemed, everybody was taken (more or less) at his or her own valuation; there was fun to be extracted from everything and every-

## YOUNG EARNEST

body, if only you approached them good-humoredly enough. And if you failed and did not find the expected fun—Oh, well, try elsewhere. There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

And then one morning Spring came to London. The black trees were powdered with green; the air was magical; the car was filled with a blithe new energy; the light gave the street and the things and people in them form and definiteness. René was up and out very early that morning to take a family to one of the stations. Three children were going away to the country. They beamed at him as though he were already a part of their coming delights. He laughed at them, and they said he was a nice funny driver, and was he coming to the country, too? Uncle George had got a new calf which they would like him to see. When he had unloaded the happy party at the station—it was that at which he had arrived the year before—he caught sight of the hill at Highgate, like a green mountain towering above the long gray streets. He turned northward and sped out over the hills and far away. Here the trees were less advanced than in London, but their green was peeping, and in a field were ewes and lambs. He stopped his engine and stood by the fence and gazed at them. Two of the lambs were playing, running races backward and forward. In the sky there were little clouds, and they too seemed to be playing. He remembered words of Kilner's:

“Real seeing is through, not with, your eyes. Then you recognize that all things visible are within you as



## LEARNING A TRADE

well as without. Then the spirit in you sees the spirit shining in all things, and it is only the spirit that can really see."

And away up north was a black city, dark and hard and remorseless, from which he had escaped. The memory of it clung to him now and filled him with a stabbing terror that, though it could not rob him of his joy, could yet bring him to a new discontent, a hungry and almost angry desire.

Back then he went to the city, and all day long busily plied his trade. To-day he closely observed all things. The wonder of the early morning was gone. He hated those who hired him, the insolent women and busy, indifferent men, for it seemed to him that they had destroyed it. Unconsciously he contrasted these people, who went so insensibly about their habitual stale employments, with the happy children going to the country.

He was engaged to seek amusement with Ann that night. She was for the Pictures, but he persuaded her to go on the top of a bus to Kew.

"But they've got the *Miserables* at the Pictures," she said, "and they say it's *It*."

"Look at the sky, my dear," he protested.

She looked at it.

"Yes. It's all right."

Usually now when he met her in the evening he kissed her, because she expected it. She had kissed him first when he had given her a present at Christmas, and thereafter it became their practice, comradesly. To-night he did not kiss her. He was stirred

## YOUNG EARNEST

at the sight of her; her friendliness, the bright greeting of her eyes thrust him back into himself and inwardly alarmed him. And she looked up at him and laughed mischievously, and swung her body from the hips up, and then moved slowly away from him, pouting her lips.

"Would you like anywhere better than Kew?" he asked.

"Wimbledon, where we saw the picture-actors. D'you remember?" They boarded a bus and were swiftly borne out over the river, up through the holiday town that had reminded him of Buxton, and out to the wide common. There they wandered. A thin moon came up. They passed whispering lovers, and men and women for whom that word was too great.

Here again was spring, the first spring evening.

Ann chattered, but René spoke never a word. Once she said:

"Dull to-night, aren't you? Are you tired?"

Her questions met with so hard a silence that she too ceased to talk.

She thought he must be offended with her, and as they returned she slipped her hand on his knee. He gripped her forearm, held it for a moment, then put her away from him.

After a long while she said:

"I didn't know I'd made you angry."

"Angry? My dear child!"

"What is it, then?"

"This damned world. This morning I took three happy children to the country, and all day long I've

## LEARNING A TRADE

been at the beck and call of men and women who have lost the power and the will to be happy."

"I don't know how you know. And you're not very good at it yourself to-night, are you?"

"How do I know? Ask Kilner."

"That beast, Kilner."

"He's my friend."

"He's no friend of mine."

Then again he was silent. The thought of Kilner had made him just a little angry with her. With Kilner the day that had begun so beautifully might have come to a glorious and brave end.

Presently she rubbed her cheek against his shoulder and said:

"Don't be cross. You'll soon be dead, and it's no good being cross. I do like being with you, really, even when we can't have fun, and you go wasting your time thinking."

He turned, and their eyes met, and he astonished her by saying:

"Ann, you don't know how beautiful you are."

She gave a little cry on that, put out her hand, and this time he held it strongly clasped. They could be happy in their silence then.

When they reached the mews she said she had supper in her room and he could come up if he liked. They ate and drank and were very merry, and it was late when he rose to go. He opened the door. She was at his side.

"Good night, Ann."

"You needn't go," she whispered.

## V

### TOGETHER

Je vais où le vent me mène  
Sans me plaindre où m'effrayer.  
Je vais où va toute chose,  
Où va la feuille de rose  
Et la feuille de laurier !

A DAY or two later he moved his few belongings from Jimmy's rooms to Ann's. It was her wish. There was no point in concealment. The mews knew; the mews had expected it; the mews did not mind. Mr. Martin was delighted:

"It's what every young woman wants, to throw in her lot with some nice young feller. If they can't be married, they can't, and that's all there is to it. Take mares now— Well, you know what I mean." He caught the boy with his head in at the door listening, picked up a ledger, and threw it at him. A bad shot, it broke a pane in the glass wall.

René had told him all the circumstances, because he knew that the mews was full of gossip, and he was attached enough to the old fellow to wish him to be in possession of the facts.

"What I mean to say," continued Mr. Martin, when



## TOGETHER

the boy had fled, "is this: If women must come ker-boosting into a man's life, it's better for them to come while he's young and fool enough to enjoy it. There's a time for everything, as the Bible says, but don't let her put on you. The best of women will put on a man if he lets her, and that's bad for both."

That was the advice with which René Fourmy's second venture in cohabitation was blessed. As usually happens with advice, he was too deeply engrossed in present interests to apply what wisdom it contained to his own case. He drifted down the stream of bliss they had tapped, and, as generously as she, brought into their common stock as much kindness, consideration, and warmth, excitement and curiosity as they needed to take them from moment to moment. Only he brought no laughter, of which she supplied abundance. Both were out early and all day long, and both returned in the evening tired but eager for the new wonder of each other's company. Indeed it was wonderful, the easy sympathy they had for each other. They could be frank. She had no preconception of what love should be, and took all its delights simply as they came, and her simplicity fed and encouraged his. It was a novelty for him to live from day to day satisfied; a kind of Paradise, if Paradise is a place where the appetites are a little overfed, so that body and mind are brought to indolence.

Kilner had disappeared for a time, having made enough to be able to retire to his painting, and René had no other society than the chauffeurs in the shelters during the day and the familiars of Mitcham Mews in

## YOUNG EARNEST

the evening. He became sluggishly content to drift. He was making good money, increased by Ann's earnings. If he ever thought of the old life in the North at all, it was with lazy contempt and indifference. His first attitude toward London was reversed. He had begun with all the northerner's contempt for the easy ways of the metropolis. He never read anything but the newspaper, and every evening would read aloud the "fooltong" in the *Star*. Ann took it for the betting. She put aside two shillings a week for "the horses," and he joined her in that pursuit. He did not so much enjoy her pleasures as her zest for them, and it became his object to keep that alive. Without that he was at moments aware of a sickening sensation that was truly horrible, making him gird at his surroundings, at certain tricks that Ann had, at habits, gestures, tones in her voice that were like his sister-in-law Elsie's. He saw the resemblance first on receiving a letter from his brother George:

"DEAR R,—A pal of mine who has been on the spree saw you in London the other day, says you drove him from the Troc to Bernard Street. I thought you'd have been off that long ago, but there's no accounting for tastes. I meant to write some time since to say the old man has hopped it again, and the mother has taken up her quarters with us. It seems some money came in—I can't make out where from—and he grabbed it and offed. It seems to have finished her; she's shut up tight, sits and knits, toddles off to church whenever there's a service, never mentions him or you. Elsie can't get anything out of her, though they talk enough together. It makes the house seem full of women. I've never set eyes on you know who since you cleared. I'm

## TOGETHER

doing well enough, and hope to get something of my own in a few years, though small business don't stand much chance in these days against the big combines. You'd be amazed at the huge joint warehouses they're putting up now. Thrigby's changing, and things are queer all round. People shift a bit now, what with the Colonies and all that. They don't stay in offices like they used to do, only it doesn't seem to make things any better for those who stay. Elsie sends her love; she always was a bit soft on you and didn't mind a bit when you cleared. I only meant to tell you about the mother, thinking you ought to know. If ever I get to London I'll look you up.—Thine, G.—Oh! Kurt Brock has gone in for the aviation and is making quite a name for himself up here."

The letter took René back pleasantly in memory, when he was suddenly startled to find himself meeting George on his own ground, with complacent acceptance of "having a good time," as the one desirable object which could redeem the ever-present evil. And then he was compelled, from that footing, to see his own revolt as an unaccountable aberration, an eccentricity, an escapade unfortunately disastrous in its consequences. He did not like that, nor did he relish being coupled in George's mind with his father, who was first indolent, then a vagabond, then irresponsible. His confidence was shaken, and he was made conscious of discrepancy and narrowly aware of having missed something of that which he set out to seek. Experience had taught him that it was no use taking any unhappiness to Ann. She would merely assume that he was unwell and probably dose him with physic from the herbalist's round the corner. Again, he saw that

## YOUNG EARNEST

George, like Ann, had a gusto in his way of living which he himself lacked, and now only enjoyed vicariously. That could no longer fret his nerves as in the old days it had done; he was fortified by the memory of his act of revolt and the months of entire independence he had enjoyed since his coming to London. He looked up at Ann from his letter.

"Bad news?" she said.

"I don't know whether it's good or bad. My father has cleared out again."

"It's made you sorry. You always look like that when you think of your home. Sometimes I fancy you really wish you had never come away."

"That's not true. I'm perfectly content. I'm learning not to blame anybody. That isn't easy."

"If you're not sorry, I don't see why you want to think about it."

"You can't forget people so completely as all that."

"Your dad seems to be able to."

"I'm not my father."

"No. But sometimes I wish you'd take a leaf out of his book. From what you tell me he does seem able to enjoy himself."

"Don't I?"

"Oh, you're better than you used to be, but you do frighten me sometimes."

"When?"

"Oh, when you look at me and don't see me, and when I go on talking and you don't hear a word I'm saying. Sometimes I think it's only because you had that queer time when you first came to London, and



## TOGETHER

then I think you can't be any different. The world does seem upside down, and it seems to me it might be better if we went right away and made a new start somewheres."

It comforted René to find that she, too, had her qualms, and that there was some stir behind her constant and equable good humor. He said:

"Oh, no. I think we shall be all right. Only we mustn't make the mistake of thinking that love makes life easier."

"Not much fear of that," she replied, with an odd little wry smile. "Mr. Martin said to me, he said, 'This here education makes a man queer to live with. If it isn't ideas,' he said, 'it's niceness; and if it isn't niceness it's bloody obstinacy,' he said. . . . And I do try, Renny, I do reelly, though of course if I hadn't the work during the day I should feel it more."

"What would you feel?"

"Well, I don't know. Oh, you know, when you look at things a long time, and when you like to sit and smoke and look inside yourself."

"I didn't know I did that. I don't see much if I do."

"Well, you do. And I asked Mr. Martin about it and he said it was education, and he said his brother-in-law was like that before he went off his head with religion. And often when I look at you and you are like that I want to put my arms round you and hold you until you stop doing it, and begin to think of me a little."

"But I do think of you all the time."

## YOUNG EARNEST

Then she put her arms round him and held him close until he forgot all but her in the dark pleasure that is called love.

And again he drifted and supposed himself content, until one day when a young man hailed him and told him to drive to Islington where there was an exhibition of modern engineering. Halfway there, the young man stopped the car, leaped out excitedly, gripped René by the arm, and cried:

"Good Lord, if it isn't old René!"

It was Kurt Brock.

"I say!" he said. "What a find!"

"The taxi's mounting up," said René.

"I say, you take me out to Hendon and we'll have a yarn. They told me you were still at it, and I was meaning to come and see you, but I'm up to my eyes in work. Let me drive."

He took the wheel and sent the car whizzing through the traffic at a speed that made René cry out in protest that he'd have him run in and his license forfeited. Kurt slowed down a little.

"Cars crawl so," he said, "once you've tried a flier."

"I've seen your name in the papers."

"Yes. I won my first race, Glasgow to Edinburgh round the coast of Scotland. Bit stiff, some of it, with mist and rain. I say, I *am* glad to see you. You're looking fit. Better life than mugging away with books, what? Though I don't know that I'd care about being out in the streets in all weathers, what?"

## TOGETHER

"Oh, you get used to that. I hate it when the engine goes wrong and I have to stay at home."

They reached Hendon and Kurt took his old friend to see his new monoplane.

"Like to go up in her? She's a snorter. Takes the air like a bird; you can feel her planes stretching to the air, and the engine's like a cat."

Before he could think twice about it, René found himself sitting up behind Kurt with the machine rushing over the ground and the engine roaring. He could not tell at what point they left the earth, but trees, sheds, houses seemed to fall away as though the earth were tilted up, and then the air rushed in his ears, caught at his throat, pressed hard against his body. He looked down. They were ascending in circles. Roads looked like ribbons, trees like haycocks, trams like toys, men and women were little dots mysteriously and absurdly moving. They hovered for a moment as they turned out of the final circle and made straight for a low gray cloud. Soon they passed through it, and up again. Presently they turned, dipped, and Kurt shut off the engine and they came gliding down; the earth tilted up alarmingly to meet them; houses, trees, sheds slid back into their places. René was startled to find the earth almost immediately flattened out again without the threatened impact, and back they darted to the hangar.

"Glorious?" asked Kurt.

"I—I don't know yet," replied René.

"How like you!"

"How do you mean—like me?"

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I mean, to admit that you don't know. Half the people I take up pretend they like it, though they hate it really. A few, like you, don't know, but they don't say so. I wish I'd been the first man to do it."

René had to walk to get warm again, and he left Kurt in his hangar for a moment to instruct one of his mechanics. He came quickly, caught René by the arm, and laughed, telling him how comic it was to see him in his chauffeur's clothes, disguised, the truant brother-in-law hiding behind a uniform. René said:

"I've got used to it now."

"Do you ever open a book?"

"Sometimes. I had a few sent to me."

"Economic books?" asked Kurt.

"No. But I go on thinking about all that. Habit, I suppose, or perhaps trying to discover what it really is all about, and I don't know. They used to call it a science, but it can't be scientific——"

"That's what I say. You do know where you are with an engine. You can eat up distance. But I thought clever people would never understand that. You used not to. Perhaps you're not clever any more. That's what I said to Linda. Oh, I'm sorry."

"You needn't be." René gulped that out, for indeed he was embarrassed. The days of his torment were brought back suddenly, came savagely breaking through his simple pleasure in the rediscovery of this enlarged Kurt, grown from boy to man without loss of youth and frankness. He extricated himself from his confusion by asking:



## TOGETHER

"How is she?" And at once he was shocked to find out how little he really cared to know.

"Linda? Well, she's a much better sort than she used to be. I don't know much about women, though I like them well enough. Linda? Oh, she seems happy. She has a house and a piano and a lot of people, goes abroad, little parties of four or five, mixed; musicians and professors, cream of Thrigsby, you know. She wrote a play for the Thrigsby Repertory Theater, all about you and marriage and sex. Rather disgusting, I thought it, but all Thrigsby flocked to see it. All the same, yes, she is nicer. Not so inquisitive; doesn't romance so wildly. The only objection I have to her now is that she will get me into a corner when I'm at home and talk about you. I think she ought to ignore your existence, as it is no longer her affair. She seems unable to do that, and she fancies I know something about you that she doesn't, though I've told her over and over again that I don't pretend to understand you or anybody else. I did tell her that you made me feel that what I wanted to do wasn't necessarily a thing to be ashamed of."

"I did that?"

"Well, it was only after you came that I was able to tell the mater that I didn't want to do as she wished and couldn't. . . . Where are you living?"

René described Ann's two rooms.

"Do you like it? I mean, aren't they rather grubby and piggy?"

René thought it over with a clear picture in his mind of Ann's room and Jimmy's and Kilner's, and the

## YOUNG EARNEST

women standing at the doors and leaning out of the windows, and the children playing in the muck. For him it was all colored emotionally. Moments of distaste he could remember, but nothing like the offended fastidiousness expressed in Kurt's tone.

"Well, yes. Untidy and careless. One day's work slops over into the next day. But, you know, my home was not so very unlike that. I used to hate it at home when I got back at night to find my bed unmade. That used to happen."

"Can I come and see you? I'm here for a fortnight. My business is up north. Got a factory now. You must come and see it if ever you are——"

"I don't think I'm likely to go north again. I feel that's finished. I don't know why. It isn't that I have any hatred for it, or any bitterness about what happened. Only I feel on firmer ground here, as though I had taken root."

"I'll come along then. Any night?"

"Almost any night."

"I'll take my chance."

They shook hands, Kurt with a grip that squeezed René's knuckles together until the pain was horrible.

"'Member our smash?" asked Kurt.

René grinned at the recollection. He was very pleased and comfortable. To have established a connection with the past through Kurt was to have it made without shock of shame or injury to vanity. Through Kurt's frank mind it was cleaned and shaped for him, presented to him so that he must make the necessary effort to strike out of himself the light

## TOGETHER

which should reveal it, the light of humor. It was a very faint gleam that came out of him, but it was enough to serve and to imprint the picture on his mind, give him possession of it, and deliver him from the anguish which attended all his dark contemplations.

"Oh, yes," he said, "and I remember how I lectured you. And now the positions are reversed."

"I don't see that."

An elegant young man in a gray suit came up, with a beautiful woman of a loveliness and charm that took René's breath away.

"How do, Kurt?" said the young man, stepping in front of him. "Lady Clewer wishes to be——"

Kurt shook hands with the beautiful lady and with her and her companion walked away toward the knot of brilliant persons gathered round a biplane that had just come to earth.

Flushed and tingling at the hurt, René rushed away, savagely wound up his engine, and glided back into the city, to the narrow place where he had till now lived in comfort and the pleasures of simplicity. Small and confined he saw it now, mean and untidy. But it had been and was still his refuge. He had been happy, and the world had ignored his happiness and snatched it away from him. He was actively angry and jealous.

He frightened Ann by the hungry affection with which he greeted her when she came home, after working overtime to keep pace with a rush of work at her factory. She liked it too. It was exciting. Yet she could not conceal her fear. She was more than his match in exuberance, but here was a demand upon

## YOUNG EARNEST

her that she could not recognize and very soon she was in tears; not her happy tears that had so often reconciled him and made him gleeful and proud. He was humbled and acutely conscious of separation from her, though they clung together. For a few moments the whole weight of their relationship was thrown upon their loyalty, and it did not yield. She slept at last, her hand in his, but he lay awake staring back into the past, fascinated as the light growing in him showed it up in continually sharpening relief—his parting from his father; him he could see very clearly; but his mother was in shadow, sitting, head down, hands busy, never stirring, in acceptance. And Linda? He could see her at that absurd tea-party when his father had shown her his picture. She walked into his life then. They sat by the tulips and she was gone. He could remember his own desire and after, only its horrible, inexplicable disappearance.



## VI

### KILNER

Could I find a place to be alone with Heaven  
I would speak my heart out.

THE next night Ann went out alone. She insisted that it must be alone, though she gave him her most happy smile to reassure him.

He sat reading a copy of *Extracts from Browning* which he had bought for twopence from old Lunt. The book was against his temper, but he found a certain pleasure in making himself read from page to page. At nine o'clock Kilner came in. He was gaunt and haggard, and his collar was dirty. He nodded, produced a pipe, and sank, as he lit it, into the wicker chair opposite René's.

"You're comfortable in here," he said. "Snug. I suppose once you're settled in here of a night you don't give a blast what goes on in the world outside. One doesn't when one has got what one wants."

René laid his book down.

"Have you got what you want?"

"I? No. I never—— I was going to say I never have. I don't suppose I ever shall. That makes me hate all the people who settle down in comfort and

## YOUNG EARNEST

pretend there is nothing more to want. And as that is nearly everybody, you can imagine the hating part of me is kept pretty busy. That again is a nuisance, because it gets between me and what I want, and makes me waste energy in analyzing myself, my enemies, patrons (when I have any), friends. My relations gave me up as a bad job long ago. They made all sorts of sacrifices because they were led to believe that my talent would in the end make me more comfortable than they had ever been. When they found that I preferred discomfort and penury and starvation to what seemed to them the simple expedient of painting what I was expected to paint (they can't understand anybody wanting to paint anything else), then they shrank away from me. They could make no more sacrifices. People don't sacrifice for something they don't see, and their eyes close just when mine begin to open. We both console ourselves with hatred. I hate what they worship: the capacity for comfort. They hate my incapacity. It is very stupid. I would give almost anything to be able to live without hatred. It seems barely possible, though you come as near to it as any man I ever knew. The pity of it is that you arrive at it by doing and wanting nothing."

"That's hardly fair," replied René. "I'm out and about all day. Every day I clean and oil the car. Often I spend hours on it."

"You do nothing that could not be done by a less intelligent man than yourself. You may do it more conscientiously, but at its best it is not good enough for your best."

## KILNER

"But surely that applies to every trade and profession?"

"Does it? I'm certainly not going to generalize. What's true of you is probably true of thousands of men. I'm not interested in them as I am in you."

"It is even more true of the work I did before," said René. "I do feel now that I am doing something. There is money earned at the end of every day, really earned by being useful. But I don't know that I think about it much. It has become a habit, like everything else."

"All right, say it has become a habit. Say that a certain amount of your energy is drawn off in habit, what of the rest? That's what I'm driving at. What of the rest?"

"I read, amuse myself, and Ann——"

"And you are going on forever, working out of habit, reading and amusing yourself, and a woman who——"

"I'll trouble you not to say anything against Ann."

"I'm not saying anything against her. She has a perfect right to be herself, but if being herself interferes with me, I have a perfect right to fight for what I want."

"What do you want?"

"Your friendship."

"You have it," replied René, in the tone of one squashing an argument.

"Yes," said Kilner, "comfortably. You try to make room for me in your little circle of comfort, and, worse still, to use me as a comfort. I can't stand that. She

## YOUNG EARNEST

knows it. That's why she keeps you away from me."

René protested:

"She doesn't."

"She does. You watch her eyes when she comes in and finds me here."

René looked up at him uneasily. Kilner pounced on that:

"You are uneasy already. I don't want to make trouble between you two. You can make quite enough for yourselves, but I mean to dig out of you what I need. I mean to try anyhow until I am satisfied that what I need is not there."

There was a challenge in this, and René had the surprise of finding himself meeting it. Indeed it was bracing to feel the painter's vigorous mind searching his own and throwing aside all that he disliked or condemned.

"Ever since," said René, "ever since our first meeting under the archway, I have felt that there was something in you that I desired to understand, something that, without my understanding it, has made more difference than any other thing in my life."

Kilner leaned forward.

"Now," he said, "now we know where we are. Most men pretend with me that they keep the emotional side of their nature for women. They don't give it them, God knows what they do with it. Most men also confuse their emotions with their imaginations. I think that is why they spend their lives in the uncomfortable search after comfort."

"And women?" asked René.



## KILNER

"You and I are not concerned for the present with women. It seems to me that you and I are in this queer place for much the same reason, because we were incapable of letting our lives run along the lines laid down for them. I don't know what you are after; perhaps you don't know yourself, but I want to tell you what I am after. I'm not a great reader of books. Some of them may have said what I'm trying to say. . . . As long as I can remember I have had the intensest joy through my eyes. I think I've said that before. It doesn't matter. I see things. At first it was just the crude pleasure of form. One thing after another, I let the whole world unroll before my eyes until I was drunk with delight in it and nearly mad. Then forms began to have a meaning and to melt into each other. I began to see relations between different forms. Beauty began to sing in color. With form and color the world was so rich that the strain upon my sight was an agony. My greed brought me to seek consolations which unfortunately did not console. If I accepted comfort, then I lost my delight in form and color and was not comfortable. I found that the way out of that was to select and concentrate. I could only select in a certain passionate mood. In an ecstasy I felt truly that I could recognize the object in the contemplation of which I could find the greatest joy, a joy equal to that of human love, and having this advantage over it that it need not be expressed in physical experience. But, once felt, it must be expressed. I do my best in paint, but it always seems impossible—except when I am

## YOUNG EARNEST

actually working. When I look at what I have done, then I know that it is impossible. One can give a little singing hint of it and no more. And then again, turning from that to life, one is disgusted. Everywhere such coarseness, such greed, such meanness, such conceit. Yet to nurse that disgust is to feel the joy fade away, to hear the song of it die down. There is no justice then, no kindness, and the world is so horrible that the soul takes refuge in a sorry silence. Youth is then a heated torment from which there is no escape, but in a kind of death that brings decay and poisons love. . . . There, if you can understand that, you can understand me. I cannot surrender my vision either to comfort or to my own disgust."

They were silent for some moments. Then René said:

"In here," he touched his breast, "I know that you are right. I have been trying all this time to understand you with my brain, but now that seems only to be a sieve through which to pass what you have said. You see, I have never tried to express anything, but there have been times in my life when I have been moved enough to understand faintly what you mean. Disgust? I know that too. Almost everything I have ever done seems to me now to have been the result of disgust. I suppose that is why I am what I am. But I'm glad you came in to-night. I was going through another crisis of disgust; I go from one to another."

"I know," said Kilner. "A man does when he seeks to find love only in women."

René winced. His friend laughed at him:

## KILNER

"Oh, you are not the only one. It begins very early. Women exploit their motherhood as they have exploited their womanhood to get us. It is not their fault. Men have kept their joy from them and preserved their brutishness. There is an even more bitter disgust lying in wait for those who seek to find love only outside women."

Ann came in on that. She stopped inside the door, and glowered at the painter.

"Oh, so you've come back?"

"Yes," said Kilner, rising. "Like a bad penny."

"Don't get up. I ain't no lady. You been talking?"

"Yes," said René. "Shall I make some tea? Had a good evening?"

"No. Rotten." She had not moved from the door. Her eyes came back to Kilner. "You can go on talking. I'm off to my bed."

And she slipped from the door into the bedroom. René met his friend's eyes. They were grimly ironical.

## VII

### OLD LUNT

The glass is full, and now my glass is run:  
And now I live, and now my life is done.

OLD Lunt was a dirty old man who wore a cracked bowler hat rammed down on his head, a frock-coat green with age, trousers that hung in loops and folds about his lean shanks, and boots held together with leather laces and bits of string. He had one room at the corner of the mews, and he lived God knows how. Ann always said that he would stand on the doorstep of a butcher's shop and sniff like a dog, and stay there until they flung him a scrap of meat. On a Saturday night he was to be seen prowling about the shops, feeling the rabbits and fowls, and then shuffling away as though his appetite had been satisfied through his fingers. He never shaved, but clipped his beard close. The skin hung so loose on his jaws that shaving would have been perilous. His eyes were gray, watery, and red-rimmed, and he had ears like red rosettes.

He used to watch for René to come out, and then wait by his own door to see if the car left the yard. If it did not, then he would come shambling along



## OLD LUNT

and stand at the gate of the yard. And if René were working on his car he would edge nearer and nearer until he could peer into the engine. Often he would stand quite silent, and go away without a word. Occasionally he would talk and mumble.

"I remember when there warn't no railways, and my brother Philip drove his horses from Glossop to Sheffle. They used to say there wouldn't be no engines. But there was engines. Then they said there wouldn't be no engines on the road. But there is engines on the road. And things grow worse and worse for poetry."

With variations, that was his customary address.

About once a month he would sidle up to René and beg for the loan of one shilling, and ten days or a fortnight later he would return a penny or two-pence.

"Interest, interest. Times bad. I must ask you to extend the loan."

Sometimes he would give the coppers wrapped up in old ballads telling of murders and hangings, shipwrecks, battles, national events, some in print, some in writing, all dirty. In this way René became possessed of an ode to the Albert Memorial:

Proud monument, thou Christmas cake in stone!  
The thing thou meanest never yet has grown  
In English soil, a virtue not content  
To be its own reward, a virtue bent  
On cheating life of man and man of life.  
We English have rejoicèd in the strife  
Of being, till that virtue chilled our blood

## YOUNG EARNEST

And had us hypnotized and nipped in bud  
Our aspiration. We of Shakespeare's line  
Had in our living made our life divine  
Till, as we grew accustomed to look at you,  
We worshiped man transformed into a statue.

This poem was written on the inside of a grocer's bag, and when it was handed to René it contained threepence. It was signed Jethro Lunt, and dated April 4, 1887.

One day Old Lunt extended his usual observations, and ended by asking morosely:

"Did you—did you read my poems?"

"Why, yes," answered René, "all of them."

"Have you really now? No one has read my poems for thirty years. It's only the old ballads I sell now, and them not often. The newspapers do all the murders and hangings. Till the halfpenny newspapers came in, I could sell a murder or two in certain streets. I had one about Charley Peace:

Charles Peace, he played the violin.  
Music excited him to sin  
Like drink with other men.

Maybe you never heard that?"

"No. I never heard that."

"No. I thought you wouldn't have. You'd hardly be born then. Hard it is to remember that there are some so young they might almost have been born into another world."

He fumbled about in the tails of his coat, humming

## OLD LUNT

and crooning to himself, and presently he produced a litter of papers and held them out diffidently, and so shyly that he turned his head away as René put out his hand for them.

"There's forty years' work there," he said. "Forty years. I was thirty-five when I began it, thirty-five, and hopeful, and I finished it five years ago. I wanted to know if you think there's any chance of its being published in a book. I'd like to leave a book behind me. I've been forgotten. I'd like someone to be reminded of me. I've been mortally afraid of the young ones till you. There's something lucky about your face, something that shines in it. There was many faces like yours in my young days, but there was no golden statue in the Gardens then, and this must have been meadows down to the river side."

He pressed his lips together and mumbled. René asked him if he could do with a shilling, but he refused, seemed so hurt that he shriveled and went away.

René kept the manuscript and read it during his off hours on the stands. It began nobly on foolscap, in a bold, spiky hand, and ended pitifully on old envelopes and leaves torn out of penny account books or yellowing sheets from ancient volumes. Thirty lines were written on the back of the title page of a copy of *The City of Dreadful Night*. It was some time before he could find his way through the manuscript. The sheets were not numbered, and they were in no sort of order. Slowly he pieced the poem together, and perceived that it was an epic in ten cantos, blank verse varied with odes. It was called *Lucifer*

## YOUNG EARNEST

*on Earth, or the Rise and Fall of British Industry*, and it was many days before its first reader could make anything out of its confusion. The Gods change: it is difficult to make anything in this century of the God of 1860. Clearly Jethro Lunt hated that God. In fierce rhetoric he denounced His claim to omnipotence, but where exactly his grievance lay, it was impossible to discover. Lucifer in the poem struggled out of Hell, and, catching the Almighty in a moment of boredom, unseated Him and sent Him down to the Infernal Regions for a space to see how He would do there, and afterward, in his spleen, commanded Him to dwell on earth. So God arrived one day in a village in Derbyshire, and, acting upon the commercial principles always employed in his dealings with man, got the inhabitants to apply the mental processes till then only used in the practice of religion, to their everyday life. Then the community became possessed of a horrid energy, set love of gain above love of life, and soon the old, quiet society of squire, farmer, and laborer was broken up, mills were built in the village, their great stacks belched forth smoke over the hills so that the heather was dirty to lie upon; the women left their homes to work in the mills, and children were taken to help them. And wherever God went, the same thing happened.

Meanwhile Lucifer was enraged to find that he was not worshiped as he had hoped. The churches also had gone into business. In Hell he had taken some pleasure in the sins of the flesh, but these had now become so mean, so grubby, and so stealthy that his



## OLD LUNT

proud spirit was revolted by them, and he said that if men liked to fritter away their substance in such trumpery they might do so for all he cared, and to occupy himself, he began to investigate the divine power which sustained Heaven and Earth. Then he perceived that God had usurped this power and abused it. He set himself to master it, and when he had done so, waited until men's love of gain had brought them to an intolerable strain so that they must release the spirit in themselves or perish. Then he went down upon the earth and engaged God in mortal combat so that they both perished, and man was left alone to work out his own salvation, for to such desperate issue had God brought them in His mischief. Upon the earth there were singers born of sorrowful women left in anguish by the evils of war and peace, not knowing which was the worse. Slowly their songs came to the ears of men, and then in fierce conflict they wrought upon God's perdition until they had made it shine in the likeness of beauty.

That, so far as René could make out, was the outline of Old Lunt's poem. Interspersed were odes in condemnation of Queen Victoria, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Tennyson, Gladstone, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Augustus Harris, Bulwer Lytton, and Thackeray; in praise of Beaconsfield, George Meredith, Charles Darwin, Cobden, Bradlaugh, General Booth, and Charles Stewart Parnell.

No critic of verse, René was unable to judge of the work's poetic merit, though he had a shrewd idea that it was small. Historically, it was very valuable to him.

## YOUNG EARNEST

The picture was horrible, of an England dotted with communities screwed up in their own vileness, of an energy turned in upon itself, desperately striving to satisfy a demand itself had created. The tension must have been terrific, and the most pitiful part of the poem was its revelation of the author's gradual yielding to it, the slow ruin of his hopes, the growing repulsion from a world in which he refused to live except upon his own terms. It was possible to mark the exact moment of his plunge into despair, for two-thirds of the way through he suddenly dropped from verse (growing more and more halting) into prose:

"Art is a world of beauty where there is a logic not of this world, but until I have seen beauty here how can I hope to reach it? I must have wings, and if my soul can find neither love nor friendship, how can it ever be fledged for flight? Hatred? That would be something. I cannot hate mediocrity. I can only let it wither me."

And he let himself be withered, though in that agony there were moments when the words poured melodiously from his brain.

The last sheet was terrible. It contained only a brief description of his room, the grubby ceiling, the sacks on which he lay, the peeling paper on the walls, the cracked window stuffed with rags.

"I lick my lips," he wrote in a savage scrawl. "Bitter!" Then he had made a blot thus:



and against it he had written: "My world."

## OLD LUNT

Twice after René had read the manuscript did Old Lunt appear in the yard, but he crept away as soon as there seemed any danger of his being accosted. And then he did not come again.

A busy time followed, and he was forgotten except that, to please him, René had ordered a typewritten copy of the poem to be made—that being the nearest possible approach to the book of his desire. This copy came home at last. Ann was asked to bind it, and did so neatly with the green cloth she had for flower stalks. Then, a night or two later, it was taken to Kilner, for him to decorate the cover. He had been told of it, tried to read it, but could not. However, he designed a decoration for the cover and printed the title and the author's name in bold letters, and beneath each he placed a blot. That part of the manuscript appealed to him more than all the rest.

"That," he said, "is what the world is to all your comfortable people, behind the charm and excitement with which they cover and disguise it. The only difference between them and your old man is that he fought to get some light on it and lost. I would rather be he than they. He does take his world with him; theirs they leave behind, caught in the meshes of their factitious morals and conventions."

"But," said René, "isn't he leaving his world all written out?"

"No, the tale of how he sank beneath its weight. It is true enough, anyhow, to have stirred you into a desire to give him pleasure. He has roused you exactly as I have been trying to do these last months."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"That's true. I do keep trying to get light on that little black world, but I say to myself that after all the sun's light is quite enough."

"It's enough for beasts and trees. It isn't enough for men unless they will consent to live like beasts, at the mercy of their instincts, in competition with the beasts, and have a very nasty time of it. No. No. The light your friend was after is the light of the imagination. Let your light so shine. He had never had it, never more than the will to have it. Probably he drank or took to some other form of vice to console himself in his more difficult moments. You'll never know. Probably we all know that is worth knowing. Young men often make blots like that because life is such an infernal long time in beginning; but for an old man—well, it looks like a sober conclusion, as though he really had faced a fact, and had the sense of humor to go on living in spite of it. There!"

He had finished the cover.

"I hope he'll like it."

René took it that same evening to Old Lunt's room. It was behind a stable and harness room used by a grocer as a store. Its one window looked out on a blank wall of yellow brick. For the rest the room was exactly as the old man had described it; not a stick of furniture in it; sacks thrown in a corner, and on these Old Lunt was lying with his legs crossed, his hand under his head, smiling up into the dim light. The setting sun struck the yellow wall outside the



## OLD LUNT

window, and the upper part of the room was filled with an apricot-colored glow. Dust danced in the light. The room was filled with an acrid sweetish smell.

Manuscript in hand, René stepped forward.

"Good evening, sir," he said, "I thought you——"

He stopped, for he knew that the old man was dead. He had known it before he began to speak, but the sound of his voice brought home to him the mockery of words. Raising the cold right hand, he laid *The Rise and Fall of British Industry* beneath it.

The light died down. The glow sank into the gloom. He crept away, told the woman next door that Lunt was dead, and she said she would go at once to the crowner's office.

## VIII

### RITA AND JOE

And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied  
All that was left of a woman once,  
Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.

**A**NN had always known Old Lunt. As far back as she could remember the mews had been her playground, and the old man coming and going had been a part of the scene.

She seemed to connect the silence that visited her mate after his death with him, for she filled it with reminiscence and stories about him. He used to sing queer old songs, and sometimes he could be persuaded to tell about the country where he came from and flowers and birds; yarns about his father's farm and the happiness he had had on it until it came into his brother's hands, and his brother had gone into the manufacturing. Then there was no home for him in the old stone house.

For all her talk Ann could not break in upon René's silence, and his eyes would implore her to cease, yet she could not cease. She went on and on talking, for she dreaded his silence as she dreaded his solemnity. They made life heavy and evil for her. If a man was

## RITA AND JOE

unhappy, there were plenty of distractions and consolations. Everybody was unhappy at times, but no one in his senses clung to his unhappiness the way Renny did. It was an exasperation to her to have him like this—"mooning and dithering to himself"—because he had been so much more complacent and docile than she had expected. She had looked for trouble, but he had slipped into her ways, and shared her pleasures with an astonishing ease and grace, so much so that she had had the mortification of hearing two women in the mews arguing about him:

"Garn! 'E ain't no scholard."

"'Struth. 'E's a college gent."

"'Im! They might come to see a working girl, but they wouldn't take up with 'er."

The trouble she had looked for should have been between herself and him, and she was prepared to tackle it so soon as it showed its head, but this trouble he kept to himself, outside her. And though she called it unhappiness, she knew well enough that he was not unhappy.

Indeed, it was a joy to him to find himself more and more alive to the world, the little, grubby, amusing corner of it in Mitcham Mews, and the great roaring whirlpool outside in which lay his work. His pleasure in London was no longer purely emotional; no longer did he, as it were, implore London to let him be a part of it. He was working in it, contributing to its life, to its bustle and noise; but since his talks with Kilner and his reading of the poetical works of the old ragamuffin, he had been able little by little to

## YOUNG EARNEST

detach himself from it and watch all that was going on. Truly there was never a more amusing city! Everything was on show. Everybody had the air of expecting to be looked at and admired; though everybody pretended also that he or she had no such expectation. When provincials arrived in London they seemed to feel all this and to wince before it, but soon they perked up their heads and behaved as though all eyes were upon them. And they went to the show-places, those of which there had been talk in their homes from their earliest recollection. But everything else also was a show to them. More and more the shops tended to become shows. Government offices were being pulled down and rebuilt to make more show. Exalted personages were bent on making a show of their common humanity. Even in the city, the offices in which Londoners worked—the counting-house behind the shop—were being razed to the ground to give place to colossal palaces of ferro-concrete and marble and plate-glass. Motor-cars were growing more and more garish and glossy; the advertisements on the hoardings were more and more crudely colored. For whom was the show? For whom was all the outpouring and display of wealth? Hardly, thought René, for Mitcham Mews, that sink of the submerged and those who could only just hold their heads above water. He thought he could find the answer in the miles and miles of little houses like the house in Hog Lane, six rooms, attics, and cellars, constantly stretching out to the west and to the east; the unceasing expansion of mediocrity, a flooring of con-



## RITA AND JOE

crete, warranted fireproof, to keep the fantastic creations of wealth uncontaminated by the sources from which wealth sprang.

These were no general speculations. As he detached himself from the spectacle of London, and observed and brought humor and charity to bear on his observations, it became more and more clear to him that in this fantastic atmosphere he could not live. He was conscious of energy within himself. Upward from Mitcham Mews led to the mediocrity of the little houses, to those who lived in the dazlement of the shows, forgetting life, forgetting death. Downward? There was no downward without sinking into the disgusting vices which repelled him. Beyond the mediocrity was only the show where everything was sterilized, thought castrated, art hermaphrodite. (Kilner knew too much of that.) At the same time, he felt that his present mode of life could not go on much longer. There would certainly be a move from Mitcham Mews, but he wanted it also to be a decision, not a mere change of houses.

Ann returned to her idea of trying a new country, and for a time he played with the idea. It had its seductions. The long voyage: the indolent life on board ship; the possibility as they slipped away from existence in England of shedding those elements in themselves which prevented the full sympathy desired by their affection; the settling in a country where class differences were not so acute. But, he felt rather than saw, that would mean isolation with Ann, and his feeling was against it. When she tried to discuss it

## YOUNG EARNEST

with him, to get him to consider the respective merits of Canada or Australia, he was evasive in his replies and soon forced her to drop it. She would show a little disappointment, but would reassure herself by saying:

"There's no place like old England," or: "Sally Wade's in Canada, and she does miss dear old London."

He was so absorbed in his thoughts and his growing certainty that he did not notice how few of his evenings he spent with her. Because she was cheerful, he imagined that she must be finding her own amusement and satisfaction. He saw a great deal of Kilner, and when the painter was otherwise engaged, liked to be out in the streets on duty. Without knowing why, he had begun to desire to save money. Every shilling put by added to his sense of independence and potential freedom. He had commenced with a money-box, but finding Ann one day shaking coins out of it, he opened an account with the Post Office Savings Bank. He said nothing to her at the moment and was angry with himself for letting it pass, but it was impossible to reopen the subject later. He told himself that Mitcham Mews was no harbor of strict morals, that its inhabitants did more or less what they wanted to do, and therefore made it enjoyable for him to live among them. (That was the reason Kilner had given him for living among the very poor. They had the same liberty as the very rich, with none of their pretensions or false responsibilities.) He had

## RITA AND JOE

dismissed the matter from his mind when it was brought home to him one night on his returning late from work.

Rita and her husband lived opposite Martin's yard. As he came out of it, René was confronted by Ann leaving their house with a basin under her arm.

"I've been seeing Rita," she said. "Joe's been out of work since the coal strike, and he's going on the drink. Her time's coming, and someone's got to do for her. It was for her I took the money."

"I—I beg your pardon, Ann. Why didn't you say so before?"

"It was the way you looked, Renny, dear. You do frighten me so."

"I'm sorry. Can I do anything to help?"

"It may be to-morrow. Anyway, soon. Would you mind keeping Joe away? He's not your sort, I know, but he must be kept away."

"All right. He shall be kept away. Is she in for a bad time?"

"I'm afraid she is. Work's been so skeery of Joe these times that it's been all she's been able to do to feed the children."

"That's bad. But she ought to have thought of herself."

"Sometimes," said Ann, "there isn't room for everybody to be thought of. If you can get through a day or two it's as much as you can manage without thinking what's going to happen in a month's time."

"Don't you ever look ahead, Ann?"

## YOUNG EARNEST

"No. What's the good? Whenever I do, it only frightens me."

"Are you frightened of anything now?"

"A little."

They had reached their room and she had begun to wriggle out of her clothes.

"I don't like your being frightened, my dear. There's nothing can hurt us, and being hurt is no great thing."

"All in the day's work, eh? Oh, well. Some things. But, don't you see, I think I'm going to be like Rita."

"Ann!"

She looked at him queerly, almost maliciously.

"What did y'expect? Making me so fond of you?"

He said lamely:

"I—I hadn't thought of it."

She was stung into silence. Presently she crept into bed and lay with her face to the wall. In a tone of almost petulant disappointment she said at length:

"I fancied that was why you were putting by all that money. I was pleased about that, I was."

René sat on gloomily in the outer room, listening, waiting for her to go to sleep. He was full of resentment against he knew not what. Her almost cynical practicality? Her acceptance without wonder of the new fact? As with the rest of his life, so now he was able to detach himself from her. She had been pleased with him because he had begun to make provision, as she thought, against the probable event. She had announced the event as one regretting the pleasantness of the past, almost as one diffidently presenting a bill



## RITA AND JOE

—commercialization. Horribly their relationship was stripped of their individualities; they were just a man and a woman separated by that which they had together created. They had known kindness and fellowship, mutual forbearance and gratitude, and now they were despoiled of these good things. He was left impotent while she bowed to the disagreeable fact and was absorbed in it. And he began to see that they had long been borne toward this separation, and to escape from the pain of it he had turned to Kilner and the things of the mind, while she had comforted herself with the things of the flesh, the sufferings of the child-ridden Rita, who now seemed to him typical of the life of the mews, a creature crushed by circumstance, by responsibilities which she could not face, a house which she could not clean, children whom she could neither feed nor clothe, a husband whom she was unable to keep from deterioration. And to think that for one moment he had seen beauty in her, when she had appeared almost as a symbol of maternity, which must be—must it not?—always and invariably beautiful and to be worshiped. His idealism came crumbling down as he could not away with the knowledge that Ann had lost in beauty for him.

It was no revulsion, no withering of his feeling for her; rather it was that the brutal fact had a burning quality to peel away the trimmings from what he felt.

He found himself groping back in his life before Ann came into it. Nothing quite the same had happened to him before. The perishing of his young

## YOUNG EARNEST

desire had left him in a whirling excitement which contained less torture than this obsession of cold realization. Bereft now of all that had made his life good and pleasant and amusing, he could only appreciate Ann and the experience that lay before her, appreciate, but not understand. That was too horrible. She had been so dear to him; such a good, kind, true, brave little soul. The resentment that he could not altogether escape he visited on Rita, as Ann had from the first visited hers on Kilner.

Why should Kilner on the one hand, and Rita on the other, draw them apart? Why had they created nothing that could be shared outside themselves? Why should that which they had created destroy that which they had valued in their life together? Why—and he came firmly back to his real obsession—why should they have so isolated themselves that the natural consequence of their love, if love it were, should be an intrusion, a shock greater than they could bear?

He listened again. Ann's breathing seemed to tell that she was asleep. He crept in to her. She was awake. After what seemed an age, she said in a dry, weary voice:

"I keep trying to think what kind of a house you lived in."

He described Hog Lane West.

"No. The other one, I mean."

"Oh, that?" He told her it was like a little house in some Gardens not far away.

Then in the same dry, weary voice she said:

## RITA AND JOE

"I have been trying to think what she felt when you left her."

"For God's sake," cried he, "for God's sake keep that out of it."

"I do try to, Renny, dear. But I can't help thinking about her sometimes when you're like that——"

"Don't talk about it, Ann, don't talk about it. Go to sleep."

"Kiss me, then. I couldn't go to sleep till you'd kissed me. Not to-night. It is all right, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes. It's all right, bless you."

"I don't want to be a drag on you, Renny, dear. It is a blessing we're not married, isn't it?"

"That doesn't matter."

"That's what I say. If it's right it can't stop, can it? If it's wrong, it must."

He kissed her to stop her talking. She sighed contentedly, slid her arm into his and pressed her face against his shoulder.

"Good night. We *have* been happy."

And in two minutes she was asleep. He too was glad of the happiness they had. He was a little infected with her fatalism. If there were to be calamities, there had been stores of frank pleasure and true delight to draw upon in defense against them.

By killing off an imaginary grandmother, Ann procured a half-day off from her work and spent the afternoon with Rita, who was weak and dispirited by the great heat which filled the mews with stale air and brought old fumes and stench from the stables:

## YOUNG EARNEST

There had been thunder and storms, and the two youngest children were down with colic. Joe had disappeared with Click and Billy, who, to Rita's great distress, had begun to seek her husband's company and to give him money—at least she supposed they did, for he had nowhere else to get it. All day long Rita talked about a bed her mother had bought for the best bedroom just before she married again, a beautiful bed with four big brass knobs and sixteen little brass knobs, and a bit of brass making a pattern at the head. And it had a real eiderdown, and the springs were not like ordinary springs, but spirals. When she had exhausted the wonder of the bed she began an endless story of the aspidistra and Mr. 'Awkins who undertook to water it and forgot for a whole week, when the leaves one by one went yellow and brown. Into this story was woven all the romance that had ever crept into Rita's life, and as a good deal had crept in through the unlikeliest corners, it was a long story. She kept it going, as it were, by killing off the leaves of the aspidistra to mark the chapters. Mr. 'Awkins was a wonderful man, but he never quite said it, and Joe wouldn't take no for an answer, and Joe really did seem to be fond of her, "and mother could be awful." Besides Joe did promise to make a home for her, and they did go and look at furniture on Saturdays, but always after they had looked at furniture they used to go to music-halls, so they never had the money to buy it. And then they got married.

For hours Ann sat listening to the woman's voice



## RITA AND JOE

droning on. The elder children had been taken charge of by neighbors. The others needed constant attention. Joe came home in the evening, merrily drunk. Ann met him at the door and told him he could not come in. He swore at her and vowed he would. She struggled with him. He was fuddled and uncertain on his legs, and she very quickly had him slithering down the stairs. He sat at the bottom and roared:

"Jezebubble! That's what you are! Jezebubble! Throwing people down!"

Ann had gone to the window, and seeing René in the yard opposite, she called to him and told him to take Joe away and make him sober. René came running up, dragged Joe to his feet, lugged him into the yard, and held his head under the tap. Joe spluttered and cursed, and when he was released, stood up with the water streaming from his hair, eyes, and mouth. He showed fight. René caught him by the neck and threatened to turn on the tap again unless he showed himself amenable to reason.

Ann called:

"Take him away."

René nodded, picked Joe up in his arms, and threw him on the floor of his car and drove him out far beyond Uxbridge into the country. There by a black pinewood they stopped. René got down and laughed, for Joe had picked himself up and was sitting perkily with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, with his hat on one side, pretending to be a lord.

"Aw! Chauffah!" he said. "Dwive me to Piccadilly Circus. I want to buy a box of matches." Chang-

## YOUNG EARNEST

ing his tone, he added: "You don't 'appen to 'ave a fag on yer, guvnor?"

René gave him a cigarette and a match, lit one himself, and sat by the side of the road.

"Was that a joy ride?" asked Joe.

"No charge," replied René.

"I've spat in the car. Is there any charge for that?"

"I'll smack your head if you do it again."

Joe looked warily and solemnly at him, then deliberately spat on the floor of the car.

"That," he said, "is to show I know you're a gentleman, and what I thinks of yer."

René dragged him out of the car, smacked his head, and flung him into the bracken.

"I'll have the law on yer," yelled Joe, trying to shout himself into a fury.

"Then you'll have to walk home. Maybe that would sober you."

"No 'arm, me lord, no 'arm. It's looking for work, guvnor, that's what it is. It makes you fuddled. 'Struth it does. Here am I with five children, doing my duty by my country, and I can't get work. Five children. 'Good!' says you, being a gentleman and well provided for. 'Who's to support 'em?' says I. 'You,' says you. 'Let me work,' says I. 'There ain't no work,' says you. 'There's going to be work for as few as possible in this 'ere country,' you says. 'Chuck your flaming union,' you says, 'blackleg the bloody unionists,' you says, 'and there'll be heaps of work at one farving per hour.' 'Five children,' says I. 'Good,' says you. 'They've got hungry little bellies,' says I.

## RITA AND JOE

'Have they?' says you. 'Let 'em come and watch the blokes coming to my dinner-party to-night.' " He had worked himself up to an excitement which he could not contain, and he burst into tears.

" 'Struth is, sir," he said presently, "I ain't getting enough to eat, and you know how it is with my missus."

"Ann Pidduck is looking after her," said René, "and I promised to look after you."

"Woffor did you take me out into the bloomin' country?"

"I hardly know. One doesn't worry about distance in the car. She said: 'Take him away.' So I took you away. I'm afraid I have rather a literal mind."

"Well, it's pretty here, ain't it? I took my eldest into the country once. When he got back he said to his mother, he said: 'There was parrots in all the trees, and as for cows there was more than one.' 'E'd never seen any bird but sparrows and a parrot. I s'pose he thought anything bigger than a sparrow must be a parrot. What they'll grow up like, Gawd knows, and He don't care. It makes me sick to think of another one coming. I'd like to know what the 'Ell Gawd's playing at making a man so that 'e 'as a great love o' women and can't get enough t'eat. Us work-in'-men ought to be eunuchs, so we ought. If you got a spark o' spirit in you it does you down every time. You can take me back now, guvnor. I'll be good."

He climbed up into the car, resumed his lordly attitude, lit a cigarette, and said:

## YOUNG EARNEST

“’Ome, and drive like ’Ell. I’ll stand the bally fines.”

The pathos of the man’s grotesque humor springing up through his misery moved René so much that he forgot his own perplexity and desired only to please him. He drove back full tilt, guessing that it was late for the “controls” to be manned, and they reached the yard just as the lamps in the mews were being lit. As they came out of the yard they saw a policeman standing at the door opposite. Joe put René between himself and the constable, and they went up to Ann’s room. There the electrician peeped out.

“I say,” he said, “I say. They’ve blabbed.”

“Blabbed! What do you mean? Who’s blabbed?”

“It’s Click and Billy I mean. They’d got stuff. I don’t know where they got it. They made me help get rid of it. I ’ad to get money somewheres. Click’s a Catholic, and he says stealing isn’t stealing if you’re starving. They must have been nabbed. I ain’t a thief, guvnor. I only helped get rid of the stuff. They said I could because I was known respectable. Respectability ain’t done me no good afore.”

“Keep quiet,” said René. “He’ll hear you. Perhaps he isn’t waiting for you.”

“’E ain’t moved. I know how they look when they’re on the cop. Devils! Sly devils! I seen ’em take Click afore now and old Bessie.”

“Be quiet, you fool. Sit down and have something to eat.”

He placed three cold sausages in front of Joe. They vanished. He produced a piece of ham. That was



## RITA AND JOE

soon gnawed to the bone. Half a loaf of bread and a small tin of bloater paste soon followed, and Joe began to caress his stomach affectionately.

"Look here," said René. "What will it mean if they get you?"

"First offender. I'd get off, all right. But the crooks 'll never let me alone, and the police 'll have me marked down as a man to nab if ever they want a 'spected person."

"All right. You sit here. I'll go and see how things are over there."

The policeman eyed René as he went in.

"Want anything?"

"No, sir. No."

"There's nothing going on here, nothing unusual. Confinement."

Ann heard his voice and came down to him. They walked up the mews. Rita was in a delirium. She kept reproaching Joe over and over again for not buying a fire-screen he had promised her. And then she seemed to be living over again in some scene of jealousy. Joe must not come near her. It might not be safe. René told her his news. Ann said:

"She guessed that. It's that's broken her up so. She thinks she isn't a respectable woman any longer. I don't know that it wouldn't be best to let him be taken."

"But doesn't that mean that he's done for? You know better than I."

"You don't get much of a chance."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Then we'll do what we can. Tell the policeman he isn't sleeping here to-night."

"All right. All right. I don't think I'll be back till the morning, and then I'll have to go to work. So good night, Renny, dear. It is good of you."

They parted. He heard her tell the policeman how things were in the house, and that Joe would not be sleeping there that night, but at his mother's off the Fulham Road. The policeman asked for the address, and she gave it him pat, and after a moment or two he rolled away. René gave him three minutes, then returned to Joe and told him what had happened, gave him a shilling for a doss, and asked him to meet him in the morning at the cab-rank in Lancaster Gate.

"If I pay your passage to Canada, will you go? You can get a start out there and have your family out after you. We'll look after them."

"Will I go?" cried Joe. "I've had enough of this 'ere blasted country. Will I go? D'you know that's been in my mind ever since that there joy ride. I says to myself, I says, moving's that easy. You been stuck still, Joe, my buck, that's what's been the matter with you."

René kept *cave* while the poor devil slunk out of the mews, and then followed him, saw him mount a bus and be borne away eastward, standing up and waving his hand as long as he was in sight.

His passing left René stranded. He had been caught up in the eddy of that little drama, and then flung back into his solitude, and, though he was cheered by his activity, he was also depressed by the horrid grub-

## RITA AND JOE

business of the life that had been revealed to him; nothing in the world for Joe but the procuring of food, the bare satisfaction of desire; an amused fondness for his children. That horrible capacity for happiness in degradation.

He stood below the lighted window of Rita's room. A moaning came out of it. A thin voice almost screaming:

"Oh, don't, Joe, don't!"

There were appalling silences. Then whisperings. A long silence that chilled him to the heart. At length the cry of the new-born child, a cry of pain. Then again silence, broken only by the sound of water and the clink of metal against crockery.

In that moment René became almost unbearably alive to the suffering of the woman, and to all suffering, and to his own.

## IX

### TALK

For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.

**I**T takes an unconscionable long time to extort money from the Post Office Savings Bank, and René borrowed from his employer to pay Joe's passage and the guarantee demanded by the Canadian immigration authorities. Joe could not thank him, but only, with tears in his eyes, shake him by the hand.

"You know," he said, "I could never have gone if I'd once been in prison. That's where they has you. If wishing could do it, you'll have good luck. And if praying's any good I don't mind trying that, though I'm not much of a hand at it and out of practice."

He gave René a crumpled dirty letter to Rita, and bade him tell her that his last thought was for her, and that when she came out he would be on the quay to meet her.

"I've told 'er in my letter it was you put a heart into me, guvnor. I'd been feeding on it that long it was nearly all eat away."

At last the train moved—(René had taken him to the station with his few possessions, smuggled out



## TALK

under the very eyes of the policeman)—Joe leaped into his carriage and sang out:

“So long!”

“Good luck!” cried René, as he moved away through the crowd of tearful women and young men on the platform.

As he was leaving the station he met Kurt, just returned from a flying visit to Thrigsby. He explained that he had been called away on business or would have been round before to pay his promised visit.

“I told them at home I’d seen you. My mother turned on a face like a window-shutter—you know, the iron kind they have in Paris, and clank down in the small hours of the morning just to make sure no one shall sleep the night through. Funny old thing! I suppose she regards you as one dead. Silly thing to do, when I’d just told her you were very much alive. Linda was quite excited and started pumping up all sorts of emotions until I asked her how long it was since she had even thought of you. Then she stopped that game. She knows it isn’t any use with me. I once said to her, ‘My dear girl, if you really felt all the emotions you pretend to feel, you’d be dead in a week.’ I never could stand that sort of thing myself. She gets them out of books, you know, and really sometimes it is quite impressive, or would be, if it weren’t so disgustingly false. It is wonderful to feel things, but you can’t feel things all the time and be sane. No one can. One’s too busy. It’s beastly to make that sort of thing cheap as they do on the stage

## YOUNG EARNEST

and in Linda's mucky novels—Oh, she's written another play, all about my mother this time. Well, after a bit she cooled down and I told her you were quite pleased with yourself, earning an humble but honest living. She wanted to know if you were alone. I said I didn't know, but anyhow it wasn't her affair. She agreed, and said that anything she might do wasn't your affair either. Then she talked a great deal of nonsense about your being the New Man, with too much vitality and intellectual energy for the outworn institutions of a demoded society, and a lot more rot of that kind. The fact is, of course, that she prefers living without you and doesn't want any fuss. The scandal had made her interesting to Thrigsby, and she can find all sorts of silly people there who want to be instructed in the art of being advanced, to think shocking things and to live without shocks of any kind. Linda's shock is keeping quite a lot of people going. I told her I should see you again and she asked me to give you her love, and to say that she is quite happy and hopes you will go and see her play when it is acted in London by the Thrigsby Players. I say, you must have thought me a swine that day at Hendon. That was a Lord and a Lady. These people haven't any manners, and one gets like them. I'm their particular pet just now. You should see me hobnobbing with Cabinet Ministers and theater managers. It is terrible how alike they are."

"You'll see a bit of difference if you come to Mit-cham Mews," said René.

## TALK

"I'll come to-night."

"Good."

Rita had come successfully through her ordeal, and she was in the dreaming bliss of having her baby by her side, with no other thought in her mind than the satisfaction of its contact, the blessed charge of its helpless little life, not yet, nor for a long time to come, separate from her own. Ann took René up to see her, and he gave her Joe's letter and told her how pleased he had been to go, and how he was looking forward to her joining him. To account for his sudden disappearance they invented a tale of an offer of immediate work, conditional upon his sailing at once. The whole thing had been so sudden (they said) that there was no time for her to be told or for him to wait to see her. Did she believe them? She looked incredulously from one to the other, but, holding the letter tightly crumpled up in her hand, she decided at length that it was a good thing to believe, and sighed out her thankfulness. She had relations who would help her until Joe sent, and when she was well she would be able to work.

Ann had engaged old Bessie to come in during the day, and asked René if he would mind her spending all her evenings with Rita, and sometimes sleeping with her for the first few days. He was only too glad that she had found a task which could absorb her energies. He told her Kurt was coming, and asked if he might bring him over to see her. She had seen Kurt's photograph in the paper and was quite fluttered.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Oh, him!" she said. "Fancy you knowing him!"  
He did not tell her how Kurt was related to him.

However, Kurt blurted it out before he had been with Ann five minutes. René looked sheepish.

"Come, now, Miss Ann," laughed Kurt, "you didn't expect him to have no one belonging to him or to keep him hidden away from us forever and ever. Because you are fond of him you don't expect him to be utterly lost to all his friends, do you?"

"I didn't know he had a friend like you, Mr. Brock, or I shouldn't have dared to be fond of him—perhaps."

"Is that a tribute to my personality or to my reputation?"

"Well," said Ann, "you do brighten things up."

"One for old Solemn!" said Kurt. "I hoped you'd have cured him."

"Oh! I don't want him to be cured. I don't want him to be different."

René's vanity was bristling, but in the face of their good humor he could not let it appear. He envied Kurt his ease and the skill with which he gauged Ann's humor to strike laughter out of her, so much so that he could not mind being the subject of it. Her laughter was affectionate.

They were in Rita's room, and she lay gazing fascinated at Kurt's brown face, with its merry eyes flashing blue light as he laughed and talked. The children had been told that the great flying man was



## TALK

coming. They had been staring at him with round eyes. At last one of them said:

"Did you fly here?"

"Not this time, my lad."

"Oncet," said the piping voice, "oncet we 'ad a bird-cage."

"With a bird in it?"

"No. We kep' a ball in it and marbles."

"What happened to it?"

"Farver popped it. I seen an airyoplane oncet."

"Did you? Where?"

"In ve Park. A little boy 'ad it."

"Right ho! We'll send you an airyoplane like that."

The children looked at each other, scared at this promised good fortune. Then they embraced and rocked each other to and fro.

René and Kurt took their leave and passed out into the mews.

"Well?" said René. "A bit of difference?"

"I don't know about that. But I'm always finding that where other folk see only riches or poverty or manners or personal tricks and habits, I see only people, and they are much the same everywhere. I nearly always like them. I'm not like you. I don't expect anything much."

"Do I?"

"Always. That's what one loves about you. You were the only person who ever expected anything of me, and you gave me confidence to expect something of myself."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Then it's not a bad thing?"

"It's a splendid thing in a way, only you need to be able to love a lot of people to bear up against your disappointments. I can't do that. I find them too amusing. I'm too easily pleased with everything they do, and, of course, I never stop to think."

"But some things make you think."

"What things?"

"Having no money is one of them."

"I don't know that the poor worry much about thinking, and lack of money is chronic with them."

"Joe tried to think. The trouble was that he didn't know how. It took him as far as the Trade Union, and left him there expecting it to do the rest. That's the trouble all round. There has been thinking enough to make the union, but not enough to use it. The mere fact of union seems to swamp thought, even in the leaders. When they speak they are always trying to say not what they themselves think, but what they fancy the collective body of men wants them to think. The result is that events always move just a little too fast for them, and they are tied hand and foot and left to the mercy of the capitalists who can afford to wait longer to see how the cat is going to jump."

"And the capitalists?"

"My friend Martin is the only one I know. But I imagine they are just the same. They expect their money to do their thinking for them. Money and crowds have just the same hypnotic effect. Do you remember on one of our tours when we were driving at

## TALK

night with the big headlight showing up the road fifty yards in front of us? It was a summer night, and as we flashed past trees the birds for a moment took us for the sun and began to wake up. It was amusing, the swish of the wind we made in the trees, the sudden singing of the birds, who sank to sleep again in the darkness we left behind us. And then as we drove along a woodland road a rabbit darted out into our light, and could not get out of it. If we drove slowly he ran slowly. If we put on pace to scare him away he kept ahead of us. If we stopped he couched down with his ears back and his eyes starting out of his head, absolutely confined by the walls of darkness round our light, and, I suppose, hypnotized by his own terror. It seems to me that human thought is a light like ours, and that individual men rush into it like the rabbit and cannot get out of it. It needs only a little plunge into the darkness to be back safe and happy in your own life, but they can't take the plunge. We were able to turn the light off the rabbit at a cross-road to let him go, but nothing can take the light of human thought off men. The analogy is rather interesting, because the light of human thought is not borne by a horrible engine, but only seems so to those who are hypnotized by their own terror, and it seems normal to be scurrying away from it and to die—morally—of exhaustion. A few men, when they come into the light, are brave enough to step out of it to discover whence it comes. They find it kindled in themselves and, tracing it to its source, they find it in the will to live, and they reach the determination

## YOUNG EARNEST

to carry it farther over the world they live in, in order to break down the walls of darkness."

"That is rather beyond me," said Kurt. "I'm no good at ideas. If you let me keep to people I'm all right. Some people do me good; other people make me feel cramped and choked. I'm not clever enough to know why. And there are lots of nice people with whom it is quite enough if one can make them laugh. They don't seem to matter either way."

"You see," said René, "human thought doesn't shine until it is energized with feeling and brought into contact with the divine power that keeps things going. That is what the scared people take for a remorseless, swift, destroying engine."

"I remember now," said Kurt, "that Linda said you were a mystic. That was when you were an economist, and I told her it was nonsense, because no mystic could read a page of Marshall—wasn't that your fat book?"

"I don't know whether it's mysticism or not, but I can't accept experience without sifting it. I suppose if I could do that I should still be in Thrigsby keeping up appearances."

"And Linda would never have written her plays. That would have been a pity."

"How absurd you are, Kurt. But you seem able to sift experience before it comes to you. You seem to be able to do the right thing at the right time."

"I never worry about it. Life seems so simple to me. Directly it looks like being complicated, I switch off and try again. The only thing that worries me is



## TALK

that it looks horribly as though I should never marry. I fall in love all right and somehow that always complicates things, so then I fall out of love. I can't love a complicated woman, and I haven't met an uncomplicated one. They all want to feel more than they do. Play-acting, I call it."

Kilner came in then. He greeted Kurt morosely, for his clothes showed that he came from the brilliant world, the object of the painter's particular detestation, and Kurt's manner might easily be taken for that affability which puts you at your ease and so disconcertingly leaves you there.

René produced beer and tobacco, made room for Kilner by the fireplace, and carried on the discussion:

"Kurt says women want to feel more than they do."

"I don't know about that," replied Kilner, "but my experience is that they generally feel more than the occasion demands. They won't leave anything to the future. I don't think it means anything except that they are not particular. They get so precious little out of men that they grab what they can and let consequences take their chance. I don't blame them either. They begin by taking love seriously, so seriously that they frighten men and make them run away. I keep clear of that, not because I'm frightened, but because I can't find a woman who hasn't been unbalanced by having had some idiot run away from her."

"That's like Kurt," René threw in. "I expect it is because you both have a passion for what you are doing. It gives you a standard. Now I don't pretend

## YOUNG EARNEST

to have a passion for taxi-driving, and I suppose that is why I take seriously things that you two are able to ignore."

"H'm," growled Kilner, stretching his long legs. "Not much in that. We're both keen on something which demands health and nerve and self-confidence, a steady hand and a clear head. We can't afford to throw our minds and passions into the common stock. I starve. Your friend has the world at his feet. But we're both outside the world, and have as little truck with it as possible."

"Both," said René, "outside the hypnotic circle." He had to explain that to Kilner, who was excited by the idea.

"I never thought of that," he said. "Yes, by Jove, it's true. They are hypnotized, every man Jack of them, rich and poor alike. Nothing can shake it off except the individual will. Every artist has to go through that. And your light, my friend, is nothing but the vision of the artist. Only hypnotism, the absolute surrender of the will, could account for the horrible distortions that appear in what they call art, what they call morality, the organization of what they call society. I know what Fourmy means. The infernal thing is always cropping up in my work. When an artist has seen what he wants to paint, there is always the danger of his being hypnotized by it, and if he doesn't shake free of that, he is almost bound to paint it badly, however skillful he may be. He may paint a picture that people will like, but he won't create a work of art."

## TALK

"Isn't it possible for a man to be hypnotized by art?" asked René.

"If he is, he won't be an artist. I've seen students surrender their will one after the other to Raphael, Rembrandt, Manet, Cézanne, not to their love of truth and beauty, but to the masterful skill which their love gave them. If they had surrendered to their love their own wills would have been strengthened, not destroyed. That is always happening: a manner is imitated, mimicked over and over again until at last it is so vilely done, so remote from the original as to have no charm to lead even the stupidest little draughtsman to make a copy. Is it so in life? I don't know. Much the same, perhaps. Weren't there imitations of Byron for generations after him? Something vile the brutes could imitate. No one imitated Shelley."

"Who was he?" asked Kurt.

Kilner stared at him aghast.

"A poet. *The poet.*"

"I suppose I ought to have known," replied Kurt, chuckling at Kilner's annoyance, "but you see I was brought up in a German household. There was a fellow called Schiller they used to talk about, and they named a club after him where they used to eat and drink."

"And what," asked Kilner, "made you take to flying?"

"Oh, I don't know. I always loved engines and speed. And after all, you know, it is the only thing to do."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Kilner thinks painting is the only thing to do," interjected René.

"I meant for me," answered Kurt. "That may be all right for him. I hate using my brains. Things get muddled at once if I do. I love using my body so that every muscle is called into play, and I loathe illness. It's torture to me to be just a little unwell. I get moments out of my work that make everything else seem nothing at all, just something to laugh at and be merry over."

"Something like that is my life," said Kilner. "A few moments, only they are not enough in themselves. I have to follow them up in spirit and express them."

"And I," said René, "am always hunting about for those moments in life and not finding them."

"Ever known one?"

"No, but I'm absolutely certain they are there. I never knew what I was after until I met Kilner. I'm not certain that I know now. But I've escaped social hypnotism so far, and from what you tell me I seem to be less in danger of hypnotism by my own will than either of you."

"I deny that," cried Kilner angrily. "You are denying the supremacy of the artist. Just because you have dodged a few of the conventional social obligations, you think——"

"I'm not denying anything of the kind. I grant you the artist is supreme and his vision the most potent force in human thought, but the artist also must be a man and must live, or there's an end of his vision. He must be prepared if necessary to live in the hyp-



## TALK

notic circle, and he must be strong enough to assert his will in it."

"That's stupid," said Kilner. "As if any of us could escape, as if that weren't precisely what the artist does. Your friend here is the lucky one. He is doing a new thing, exercising a new faculty which is imperfectly developed, so that it is not yet prostituted and abused, as art, science, and love have been. He is still a wonder, even to fools. I who aspire to art, you who aspire to love, are to the world nothing but idiots who have not the *nous* to help themselves to the plunder and comfort ready to their hands. But you and I are braver than he, for we seek greater things. He is content with physical health and adventure. That is something. It is a higher aim than money and money's worth. But you and I are definitely pledged to accept only the happiness we know to be true, and the sorrow to which our wills can consent."

"I dunno," said Kurt, rising, "but I daresay there's a good deal to be said on the other side. I'm not so sure, though. I know lots of the other people, and they've never given me such an amusing evening. I haven't had such a good time since I came to London, where everybody thinks of nothing but having a good time. I'll come again. Anyhow, you're not worrying about what other folk are thinking of you, and that's the only thing I can't stand. Good night."

Kilner was too excited to go to bed, and he kept René up till three o'clock in the morning talking about a picture he was painting of God creating Eve out of Adam, who was to be shown in an attitude of sur-

## YOUNG EARNEST

render, though his body gave signs of a fearful agony. Yet was it Adam's will to submit to any torture to attain the knowledge of the almighty joy of creation.

René was curious about the woman's share in the operation, and was vaguely distressed to find that in Kilner's intention Eve was to be no more than beautiful.

"But is she to have no share in creation and the joy of it?"

Kilner was pacing round the room. He waved his fists in the air.

"Don't you see? Don't you see?" he shouted. "Don't you see that we have created her? Even if you drop the myth and take to evolution, don't you see that woman has been nothing but the creature, the instrument of reproduction? Don't you see that man fell in love with her, and with his love slowly humanized her, gave her intelligence, humor, charm?"

"Might it not be," said René, "that woman was first, and evolved man to do the work so that she might reserve more energy for conception? And again, there seems no reason for imagining that either came first. The difference in sex is a great deal more superficial than is generally supposed. It must be. It is aggravated by environment and habit, training and physical processes, but it is not a fundamental difference."

Kilner said:

"You may be right. You sometimes are. But for the purpose of my picture Eve must be stupidly beautiful, just beauty and nothing else. If you like I'll

## TALK

paint another Adam and Eve when he has begun to love her, and through love has come to the desire of knowledge. But I'm afraid her eyes will still be stupid, and she will still think him rather a fool for desiring anything but her."

## X

### AN ENCOUNTER

Nous ne dépendons point des constitutions ni des chartes, mais des instincts et des mœurs.

**I**NTELLECTUAL conversation is a very common vice among men who have been subjected to what is called education. The wages of it is commonly a brutal onslaught by the body upon the mind. The intellectual is subject to accesses of bestiality unknown to the manual laborer, who for that reason regards the cultured man with more amusement and contempt than respect and envy.

It was impossible for René to surrender to his exasperated senses. He was too certain of his goal for that, though he could not on any side perceive a way that should lead him to it.

Ann was devoting herself entirely to Rita and her family. She would emerge now and then to inspect him, and to make sure that he was not straying from the path of good sense. She scolded him roundly for his all-night sitting with Kilner—(she had seen the lighted window at two o'clock)—much as the other women in the mews rated their men for drinking or betting. Having delivered herself, she returned to her



## AN ENCOUNTER

usual attitude of indulgence and affection, kissed him, tidied his hair and went back to her charges. That might have satisfied a navvy, but it did not satisfy René. He was still mentally inflamed with Kilner's talk, and he wanted very much to know if Ann thought him a fool for desiring anything but her. He was fairly sure she did, but he wanted to be thoroughly, painfully sure. The old reaction, you perceive, from visionary enthusiasm to disgust.

His mood made him thoroughly, savagely approve of Mitcham Mews. It had character; not a nice character, still an appreciable individual quality. Almost all the other habitations he knew of in London were uniforms, disguises. Even the delicious little houses in Westminster were consciously Georgian or Queen Anne, part of an attitude. . . . He was wearying of it all. He had caught something of Kurt's healthiness and desired to do something that contained adventure and risk, and the exercise of more than habitual skill. He hated being at the beck and call of any man or woman who signed to him, and sometimes he gave himself the pleasure of ignoring them if he did not like their looks. Once when he had been summoned by whistle to a house in Bayswater, and its door was opened to emit a large Jew and an expansive Gentile lady of pleasure bent on an evening's snouting in the trough of the West End, he put his fingers to his nose, and drove off as hard as he could. That helped to put him on better terms with his rebellious physical existence. He had insulted it. That was something.

## YOUNG EARNEST

But he could not subdue his excitement. He found two poor little lovers in the Park one night, and took them out into the country free of charge. That squared the outrage on the Jew. It was an active step toward pure romance. The little lovers had occupied less and less space in the car as he brought them home under the moon, and his engine sang a droning bass to the song they were living.

And when he reached home he was brought hard up against the fact that he was Ann's acknowledged lover, and that she was going to have a child by him. It had, he knew, nothing in common with the Jew, but also, he could not help feeling, it had lamentably little in common with the young lovers. It was a fact like the nose on his face, a part of himself, no getting away from it; a fact, however, that brought no illumination. The nose on his face, he thought, must have been once a brilliant discovery. It must have meant a revelation of noses that, among other marvels, there were such things.

There was some zest in the fantastic agility of his intelligence, and this kept him going.

One night as he was passing a glaring public-house in Chelsea, he thought he saw his father go in by the door of the bar parlor. He drew up, stopped his engine, and followed. Sure enough it was his father, aged a little, grayer, but more sprucely clad. Mr. Fourmy was already the center of a little group standing by the counter—painters, models, and men who looked like actors. He was talking away, exactly as

## AN ENCOUNTER

he used to do in the Denmark, with the same result in laughter and free drinks. René ordered a Bass and took it to a table at the side, removed his peaked cap, and waited for his father to recognize him. This Mr. Fourmy did in a few minutes, nodded with perfect coolness, and went on with his talk. He kept it up for a few moments longer, "touched" one of his hearers for half-a-crown, and, that done, let the conversation flag, the group dissolve, and came over to his son.

They shook hands. René grinned as he saw his father's amazement at his clothes.

"Well, I'm jiggered," said Mr. Fourmy, "I was fair flummoxed when I saw your face. I didn't notice your togs. I never thought you would come to this."

"I shouldn't have done any good in your profession, father."

"So you've learned some sauce. That's new."

"I've learned a good many things, father, and unlearned more."

"Have you learned what a rotten hole the world is?"

"No. I like it too much to think ill of it."

"Then you haven't had a really bad time. I hoped you'd have a filthy time. You needed it badly, to let some of the gas out of you."

"It's been bad enough," said René. "And there's worse ahead. Are you living in London?"

"I've been here some time. It's a dung-heap. I shall go over to Paris. I'd rather die there than anywhere. There is French blood in us, I believe, and I

## YOUNG EARNEST

never could stomach the English and their hypocritical ways. What did they say of Gladstone? 'Plays with the ace up his sleeve, and pretends God put it there.' That's the English way. I like blackguards. I'm a blackguard myself, but I think God ought to be kept out of it. . . . You're looking fit."

"I'm fit enough. George told me you'd left. I'd like to know why. I don't want to open old scores or inquire into your private affairs, but it seemed to me that my mother was very good to you when you came back."

"Well—— It was the same old trouble. Religion. Marriage is none too easy, as you seem to have found. You can worry through if you play fair and fight through the emotional storms that threaten to drown you. Now it isn't fair for a man to draw off his emotional disturbances in drink or money-making or gambling or flirtation; and it isn't fair for a woman to draw off hers in religion. Women are devils at that. They go off to church and come back as cold as ice, with their hands full of little parcels of principles and precepts, all forgiveness and humility and submission and iron virtue. Some men can live with it. I can't. That's the whole story."

"Thank you," said René.

"Now, don't think hardly of your mother. She was brought up to think all men horrible, and she never got over it. I was wild and idiotically affectionate, and couldn't understand why she held back so. When I did understand, the mischief was done; she was hurt and scared, and kept you boys from me. Didn't want



## AN ENCOUNTER

you ever to be men—as if she could prevent it! She did try with me when I came back. Perhaps she'd seen and felt more than I thought. It wasn't all church nonsense about accepting your husband, however loathsome he may be to you. Your going off like that set her back again, and back she went to her church. She thought it was all my doing, and perhaps it was."

"No, no," said René.

"I think it was. I ought to have seen that I wasn't fit company for anyone I loved. Too far gone, I suppose, too far gone."

"I'd like you to know that I'm glad it happened. It has saved me from going through life with my eyes shut. I've met good people and understood their goodness. And I've met miserable failures and seen how even they have some sweetness in their lives. And I owe it to you, father, that I have seen the wildness of life beneath the trumpery policing we call civilization, and now I feel that I shall never be blind to it."

"That's all right," said his father, "if you don't let the wildness break up your own self-control. That's what happened to me. Queer how clever two men can be when they understand each other. Can you lend me half-a-sovereign, and then I'll have enough to take me over to Paris?"

René gave his father ten shillings in silver, they shook hands, the old man patting the younger's shoulder, and they quitted the bar parlor together.

As René was starting his engine, a lady came up and asked him to take her to an address in Holland Park.

## YOUNG EARNEST

He did so. The lady looked at him curiously as she paid the fare, walked to the gate of the house, turned, hesitated, then came back.

"Excuse me," she said, "you are so like someone I used to know. Aren't you Mr. Fourmy?"

He looked at her, seemed to remember her, but could not place her, though he thought dimly of Scotland.

"Yes," he said, "that's my name."

"Mine," she said, "was Rachel Bentley. I'm married now. I recognized you at once. I was so interested coming along. I hope nothing has——"

"Oh, no," said he, smiling, "I never had any money, you know. I drifted into this. I like it."

"I only thought," she said vaguely. "I mean— Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm glad it isn't that. Good-by."

She seemed embarrassed by her own generous impulse, and it was a relief to him when she turned away. He waited for a moment to see if it was her own house. She opened the door with a key. He took note of the number, and, as he passed, of the cab-rank at the end of the road.

It was some time before he knew why he had done this, many hours before he was confronted with the image of Cathleen Bentley, in the woods of Scotland; Cathleen shaking the bracken from her hair, smiling up at him in the musing, perplexed happiness of her youth.

## XI

### VISION

*πολλὰς ὁδοὺς ἔλθοντα φροντίδος πλανοῖς*

THERE came a letter from Joe to say that he had obtained work with a good firm within a week of landing, and would soon be able to save or borrow enough to pay for his wife and children to join him. Rita, who had sunk into a despondent lethargy, was roused to excitement and began to thrill the children with tales of the adventure before them. She quickly recovered her health and energy, and wrested the control of her affairs from Ann, who did not like it. Feeling ran high, and things came to such a pass that the two women quarreled, and Rita so far forgot herself as to fling a sneer about marriage-lines at her friend. Ann came running to René for comfort, and tried to enrage him at the tale of such base ingratitude. He was not to be enraged, however, for he had been pondering the subject of gratitude and come to the conclusion that he who lays claim to it forfeits it. He tried to explain to Ann that she had overdone her kindness and should have known the moment to withdraw. She was dismayed.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Of course," she cried, "you would take her side against mine."

"It isn't a question of sides. You couldn't expect her to let you go on running her house forever."

"A shiftless little fool like that! I wouldn't have minded if she'd only said 'Thank you.' Not a word did she say, but just flung you in my face. And now you say she's right! I wish you'd never come, I do."

"Ann, dear, don't be silly."

"I do wish it with all my heart and soul. You've made me be different. You've made me want to do good things, and then you're nothing but a shadow slipping away. And, oh! it does hurt so."

"Dear, dear Ann, don't you see that Rita wanted to get rid of you and didn't know how to without a quarrel?"

"Why should she want to get rid of me? Nice mess she'd have been in without you and me."

"You go and see her to-morrow, and you'll find her all right."

"I don't want to see her ever again, nasty ungrateful rubbish!"

"Then I'll go and see her."

"You won't see me again if you do. I can up and off when I like. We're not married, remember."

"You leave me nothing to say. I've learned a good deal from the people in the mews, but not their way of quarreling."

He had been irritated into the reproof and was sorry as soon as it was uttered. She was furious. Never before had she lost her temper with him, though they



## VISION

had had wordy passages. Now she turned and rent him:

"I don't believe you're a man at all, and I don't believe you've got a heart. Squabble, you call it? I wish you would. You sit there with your fishy eyes staring at nothing, thinking, thinking, thinking. What's the good of it all? Who's right and who's wrong? What's it matter? If you loved me I'd be right whatever I did. Go on! Look at me! You don't know me, don't you? I'm the woman you've been living with these last two years. That's who I am. If you're sick of me, why don't you say so? I'm no lady, thank God. I do know when I'm not wanted. I'm not going to stay with any man on God's earth when he doesn't want me. I've nearly left you time and time again, when you've looked at me like that."

He brushed his hand across his eyes. He was feeling sick and dazed. She looked so ugly.

She went on:

"I've put up with things because of you, I have. You don't know what people say, or care. You won't never know what they say, you're that blooming innocent, thinking everybody means well. I've put up with things, and been glad of 'em, and I've put up with things from you that I couldn't have believed any woman would ever have to put up with——"

He said quietly:

"Have you done?"

She gasped at him, tried to stop, but because she had begun to enjoy her fury, she forced the note and screamed at him:

## YOUNG EARNEST

"You want a virgin saint to live with you, not a woman."

Now she stopped, aghast at herself, horrified by the pain and disgust she had brought into his eyes. He could hardly speak, and jerked out:

"I didn't know. . . . I didn't know I'd done all that to you, Ann. I'm so terribly sorry. I seem to make a mess of things always."

She had turned her back on him, and he knew that she was weeping. He had no desire to console her. He wished only to get away. Neither could break the heavy silence that followed the storm. He left her, though he could hardly move, so acute was his physical exhaustion. Groping his way along the wall of the mews, he counted the doors until he came to Kilner's. The rooms were empty. He flung himself on the bed and lay chilled and racked, thinking only of Ann weeping, unmoved, detached, feeling neither sorrow nor hate. She had robbed him of all capacity of emotion, all power of thought. The storm had been so unlooked for. Rita was so remote from them. Why should Rita and anything she said or did have let loose upon them so violent a convulsion?

Ann weeping, Ann silent, so appallingly silent. Her silence weighed on him more than her words. Desire grew in him slowly and painfully, a desire to understand. He remembered exactly what he had said to her, and the words seemed meaningless. Her silence had killed them. They were genuine as he spoke them. Speaking them, he had surmounted his disgust and horror at her rage. Yet there was an even more burn-

## VISION

ing fury in her silence. She was weeping; Ann, the gay little comrade, was weeping, and her tears had moved him not at all.

He began to think again, and to think with a new power. His body was cold and aching. His mind seemed to leave it. His mind played about Ann, the figure of Ann, weeping in silence. It played maliciously about her, stripped her, let down her hair, revealed her nakedly as woman, short-legged, wide-hipped, small-breasted, not so unlike a boy save for the excrescences and distortions created by her physical functions. That was too horrible. With an effort of will he brushed it aside, wrenched away from its fascination. Her individuality was restored to her and a little warmth crept into his vision of her. He was not sensible of her charm, and he was free of all lover's memory of her attraction. His mind went probing into hers, saw how it delighted in impressions, but could make no store of them; how her delight had been increased by love and how she had used her love to aggravate her sensibility to the point of intoxication; how the fierce hunger for intoxication had desired to feed on him, and how her love for him had made her desire to bring him to the same condition. He saw her innocence; how free she was of deliberate purpose and set greed; how animal and yet how little sensual; and how she was snared in her own ignorance of love and its ways. Trapped she was and baffled. She could have been so happy with a mate as ignorant as herself, as willing to be snared. They could so easily have perished together, and sunk into resignation, she

## YOUNG EARNEST

and such a mate. And inexorable nature had made her fruitful, to bring forth in her rage, when she would be spent with tearing at the meshes that had caught her. She would go on tearing, tearing, and he could spare her nothing. His strength could not sustain her. She desired only his weakness, to have him with her, caught and struggling; to have him by her side, spent and broken, to take comfort in the child.

He seemed to himself to be so near this fate, so nearly caught, that he cried out:

"I will not! I will not!"

For a moment the words startled him and shook him out of his stupor. Then his agony came back with a redoubled fury, and in the desperate hope of fighting it back he let words come tumbling out, hurling them from him:

"I will not be used for a creation in which I know no joy. I will not cloak brute creation with a seeming joy distilled by mind and time and custom. I will not be used up and broken and cover indecency with false decency, nor be comforted with the life that has stolen my own. My life shall give life, and for the giving have only the more to give. That which I have done with the spirit not awakened in me is done and no longer a part of me. That which the spirit does in me lives on forever and ever."

Kilner found him lying in the darkness, staring with vacant eyes. He was terrified. René looked so deathly. He sat by his side and chafed his hands, and caressed him tenderly, soothed him, spoke to him in little



## VISION

staccato phrases, and went on with them until he seemed to listen:

"The lamps aren't lit to-night. It's very dark. Do you hear? Stars shining. Wonderful stars. Better than lamps. I say, stars are better than lamps."

At length René said:

"Yes. Stars are much better than lamps. Lamps are only to prevent people committing a nuisance. Stars don't give a damn if they do."

"I quite agree," said Kilner. "Drink this brandy."

When he had drunk, René said:

"Women ought to be like stars."

"Rubbish!" grunted Kilner. "Women ought to be like women."

"I've been trying to understand things."

"Awful mistake. A fellow like you can't understand things. He can only live them. That's why you have such a rotten time. No power of expression. If only you could write or draw, or play some instrument—though I hate music. But if you could, you wouldn't be you."

"You're a clever fellow, Kilner. I wish you'd tell me what's the matter with me."

"Too much vitality for a society which dislikes it, as it always will as long as it prefers the shadow to the substance, bad art to good, and imitations of things to the things themselves."

René looked disappointed. Kilner patted his hand.

"Too intellectual! Personal, then. What's wrong with you, my friend, is that you are out for the grand passion. It doesn't happen more than about once in

## YOUNG EARNEST

two hundred years. Why? I don't know. It depends on two people, you see, and I suppose two first-rate people don't often meet. The rest of us lie about our love affairs to make them tolerable. I lied that night when I first met you. I wanted to make an impression. The only reason for lying I ever knew. I told you my one decent love affair lasted for five weeks. It didn't. It lasted for exactly five seconds, the time of the kiss under the almond-tree in which it was born and died. Nothing more was possible, she being she and I being I. It was a decent business because we didn't try to pretend it was anything else. So far as it went, it was so true as to make falseness impossible. We shall both live on that for the rest of our lives. Just enough to make marriage impossible for us. We shall both marry someone else for company, and as a defense against a growing tendency to promiscuity. You don't seem to have that tendency. Life's too serious for you. You are incapable of a love affair without an attempt to make it a spiritual thing. Where we get excited, you get exalted, which is infernally bad luck on the average woman. Feelin' better?"

"Yes," said René, "but you do talk a lot of drivel."

"Hurrah!" cried Kilner. "He's beginning to find himself. I wonder if you'll ever see how funny you are?"

"I wonder?" said René, and he turned over, and in one moment was fast asleep.

## XII

### SETTLEMENT

Our conscious actions are as a drop in the sea as compared with our unconscious ones.

ANN came round in the morning, very petulant and angry because she had lost half-a-sovereign. This had so upset her that, once she was satisfied that René was not so ill as he looked, she had no other interest, and could only give vent to her annoyance in little splutters of irritation. She sat by René and talked about it until he had to ask her to go away.

"All right," she said, "I know when I'm not wanted. But I do hate doing a thing like that. I can't think how I did it."

"There was once," said Kilner, seeing how she was fretting his friend, "a crooked woman who lived in a crooked house, and she lost a crooked sixpence."

"I know that story. Only it wasn't a crooked woman. It was Mrs. Vinegar, and she lived in a bottle, and she lost a sixpence and broke the bottle sweeping for it. Oh, Renny, he thinks I'm like Mrs. Vinegar! I am awful, I know."

René smiled at Kilner. Ann said:

## YOUNG EARNEST

"If there's any overtime to-day, I'll take it. Will you—be back to-night?"

"I think I'll stay here if you don't mind."

"Will you— You'll let me come and see you?" She seemed to appeal to Kilner. He nodded. His consent comforted her, and she rose to go. René took her hand and said:

"Ann, dear, I want you to believe that whatever happens I am always your friend."

She answered:

"I saw Rita this morning. She's all right."

"That's good."

"I was awful, wasn't I? Something seemed to come over me. I didn't want to be a beast, really I didn't. Only I do hate it when you can say what you mean and I can't. I do want to make it up, Renny. Only it doesn't seem like ordinary rows, does it?"

"Come and see me to-night, Ann. You might tell old Martin I can't take the car out to-day."

"You're not ill, are you?"

"No. Only what you'd call queer."

Kilner followed her out.

"What's the matter with him?" she asked.

"You."

"Oh!" She was dismayed.

"I don't mean it in any insulting sense. His affections and yours don't work in the same way."

"I don't understand."

"That's it."

"I do understand more than you think, Mr. Kilner. If a feller wants to leave a girl, I say she's a fool to try



## SETTLEMENT

and keep him. I don't believe Renny's that sort. I don't believe he'd see a girl left."

"He's done it once."

"Oh! Her! That's different. She wasn't fond of him like I am."

"You don't know."

"Don't I? Besides, she was one of your ladies. I'm sorry for them, always keeping one eye lifting on what other ladies are going to think."

"Suppose he did leave you."

"That's not your business, Mr. Kilner. If he did, I'd know you'd been making him upset with your talk."

"It isn't all talk."

"What is it, then?"

"Something just as deep as what you call love; probably deeper."

They had walked down the street leading to the mews, and now came to the corner. Ann stopped and stood hesitating. Her hand went up, and she pulled at her lower lip and shifted her feet uneasily.

"I known girls be left," she muttered, "girls like me. They pulled through somehow. But I don't think they was fond of the men like I am of him. And you say he's fond of me. I know there isn't anybody else."

"Is that all you care about?"

"He's never looked at anybody else. I'd feel better if he did. What call has he to go and make trouble if there isn't anybody else? Lots of girls would have chucked work when they'd found a man like that to

## YOUNG EARNEST

live on. They get sick of being on their own. I've been on my own since I was sixteen, and I couldn't give it up for anybody."

"And yet you expect him to give it up?"

"No, I don't. I expect him to stand by me, that's all. I have my feelings too. He's not the only person in the world with feelings. I'm very fond of him, Mr. Kilner, but sometimes I think he's a bit soft, and I do hate a softy. Ooh! I'll be late."

She walked swiftly away. Very young she looked. She moved not gracefully, but with a birdlike energy that was pleasing. Kilner, surveying her figure, approved of it, until he came to her shoulders. They were slightly stooping and rounded, and she swung them awkwardly as she walked.

"Ugly and weak," said Kilner to himself. "Stooping over an infernal machine. Taken something out of her. Not her spirit. Given her a cramped habit of body. Nonsense. No good trying to account for it. He is simply not in love with her, never has been, nor she with him."

He went up to his room and found it empty. No René. No sign of him at Ann's. He had not been seen at the yard. His car was out with a temporary driver. A child in the mews had seen him in the main road. He had gone into a tobacconist's and then climbed on a bus. The tobacconist remembered his coming in to get change for a sovereign. He looked rather strange and excited. "It's a fine day," said the tobacconist. "Fine, be blowed," replied René. "It's

## SETTLEMENT

as empty as hell." "I wouldn't say that," said the tobacconist, "with the sun shining." "But I do say it," insisted René. "You couldn't call that shining." And then another customer came in.

Kilner had some knowledge of his friend's ways and haunts, but he sought in vain.

He met Ann in the evening with his news. She looked scared and protested:

"He's gone to his home. He must have gone to his home. You could tell he was always fond of his mother."

"What makes you think that?"

"He wouldn't go anywhere else."

"Did he talk about his home?"

"Hardly a word. But he told me he'd met his father. He's gone to his home. He'll be back."

"I don't feel so sure about that."

"Well, I know he'd never go back to the old life, books and all that. He said he never would. He said he'd learned more about econ— What d'you call it?"

"Economics."

"That's it. He said he'd learned more through being with me than in four years' work at books and lectures."

"I should call that an exaggerated statement."

"He'll come back. I know he wouldn't see me left."

They met Martin rolling to his home. When they told him, he screwed a chuckle out of himself and squeezed his eyes up tight.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Onsettled," he said, "onsettled. I seen it a-coming on. Thinks I to myself, I thinks, when I sees him coming in in the morning: 'Brewing up for trouble, you are, young man; but whether it'll be Glory to God or Down with them as pays wages, or what, I don't know.' I was going to say he'd better have a holiday, and now he's snoofed it."

"He'll come back," said Ann.

"Don't you go counting on that, my pretty. He ain't our class, and never could be. You've only to see him drink to know that. If he was our class he'd be worse'n the rest of us. Don't you go counting on that."

"He'll come back. He ain't a sneak."

"When it comes to women," said Martin, "any man's neither more nor less than what he can be. But if you find it lonely waiting you can come and sit with me. I ain't a-going to see you let down, my pretty, not for want of money or a helping hand. If your heart's set on him, I can't do nothing there; but, Lor' bless you, hearts ain't everything."

"Good for you, Mr. Martin," said Kilner.

"Oh, I know a thing or two." The fat man winked. "You don't have to do with 'orses for nothing. I had a 'orse once took a uncommon fancy to a goat there was in the mews. Had to see it every day. The goat was sold, and that there 'orse pined away. I kept on a-telling of him that no goat in the world was worth losing a feed of oats for, and at last he got so precious hungry he believed it, and I never did see a 'orse so glad to eat. Fancies come and go, but your belly lets



## SETTLEMENT

you know it's there till you die. Will you come in, too, Mr. Kilner?"

"No, thanks. I must get to bed early. Work in the morning."

When Kilner had gone, old Martin said to Ann with an affectionate touch on her arm:

"That young man has a 'ead screwed on his shoulders."

"He's all head," said Ann, "and I hate him."

"Lor'! There's talking. How women do like to make a man wriggle. I never was much in the wriggling line myself, not being the build for it. But a 'ead's worth having, too. I never had much 'ead myself. Too affectionate myself. What a pretty little thing you was, to be sure. Feeling it bad, my pretty?"

"Hellish bad," replied Ann.

"There, there."

"I never thought I'd feel anything so bad. I want to hate him, but I can't. I do hate that Kilner. I'd like to see him dead."

"There, there. 'Orses has wunnerful strong dislikes, too."

Ann said:

"It's enough to make a woman scream, the way men talk."

Old Martin's huge face expanded in astonishment. He reached out his hand for a pipe, filled it, conveyed it to his mouth, and sank into a brooding silence. He broke it at length to say:

"Women has a great scorn o' men, and I don't know but what they deserve it."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"If there's one thing I hate," said Ann, "it's being dished. I suppose I always knew it couldn't last. It was too wonderful. You don't know how kind he was in his ways, never wanting anything you didn't want yourself. And that was awful, too, because it made you afraid to want anything. It seemed to shame you. He was always shaming me, and I did feel awful sometimes. But it was lovely when we went for rides on tops of buses."

This appreciation of René's qualities as a housemate seemed to bore old Martin, for he took up a newspaper and began making notes and calculations from the betting columns.

"Hullo!" he said. "This must be some connection of his. 'Miss Janet Fourmy of Elgin, N.B.' 'Miss Fourmy,' it says, 'was a distinguished German and Italian scholar, a Goethe translator, a contributor to the Scottish Encyclo—' what you may call it. 'In her youth she was familiar with the famous Edinburgh circle which gathered round *Maga* and did much valuable philological work, and was for a time governess to the late Archbishop of Canterbury who never ceased to express his admiration for her intellect and gifts. She had many friendships with the interesting figures of her day, and it is believed that she has left some record of them.'"

"He told me about her," said Ann. "He used to go and stay with her, and she used to read an Italian book called Dante, with the pages upside down. She was very old, but good to him, and she thought Lord John Russell was in love with her."

## SETTLEMENT

"Lord who?"

"I don't know who he was, but that's the name. Renny says it was her weakness. She lived all alone, and it's very dreary in the winter in Scotland. She had met a lot of lords in her time, and she liked to remember more than she'd met. And she'd never married, and Renny says she thought it sounded well to account for it by saying that Lord John Russell was in love with her. It wasn't always him——"

"Well! the things women do think of. I shall say I remained a widower because of Madame Tussaud."

"She was fond of Renny," said Ann, and that seemed on her lips the noblest possible epitaph for old Janet. She added:

"Perhaps that's where he's gone."

"I shouldn't think so. It costs a pile o' money to go to Elgin, N.B. It's a good deal north o' Bedford, which is the farthest I ever went with the 'orses. That was in eighteen-eighty-four."

He settled down for a story. Fortunately for Ann, he was allowed to get no further than clearing his throat, when he was cut short by the entry of Casey.

"Evening, miss," said he. "I seen your young man in the neighborhood of Holland Park, standing on a street corner. I nodded to him, but he looked clean through me. Very queer, I thought. We've been good pals. When I came back an hour later he was still there. I was empty that time. So I stopped. 'Keeping the pavement warm,' I said, cheerful like. 'Trying to warm myself,' said he. 'Draughty weather to be doing that in the streets,' I said. 'You go home,

## YOUNG EARNEST

Casey,' he said. 'Oh, well,' I thought, 'we're all fools, and every fool to his own folly.' So I left him. I came home that way just now and he'd gone."

"We been talking about him all evening," said Martin, "me and Annie here."

"He's one of the best hands at an engine that ever I saw. And that brings me to what I want to talk to you about, guv'nor. I been to see the doctor again, and he says London's doing me a bit of no good, and if I go on with it, it'll do me in. Now I've got an idea. Leastways it isn't all my idea but mostly hisn, young Fourmy's."

"If you knew about 'orses, there's a good livery at Barnet."

Casey persisted:

"My idea is this: There's just a few want motors in London. Something's happening in the place. Well, one night in the cab-rank young Fourmy, Young Earnest, as we call him, took out the map of fifty miles round, and he pointed out how the railways go out of London like spokes of a wheel. Between the spokes, he says, is where London is going to live if it is made possible, and motors ought to make it possible. He says if you choose your place properly, so as to link up the main roads and two railways, you'd be bound to make a living. There's enough houses already. Soon there'll be factories and works out there. Then there'll be more houses. I didn't believe it at first. I said: 'But if all the people live out there, what's to become of dear old London?' 'London,' he says, 'will be a clearing-house and capital, a real cen-



## SETTLEMENT

ter.' I didn't understand altogether what he was talking about, but I've been out to see for myself, and what he says is happening. All the little country towns have cinemas and new shops, and in the suburbs there are whole streets of houses empty. I'm no good for the West End traffic, and I want to try my luck at the other, if I can get hold of any capital."

"Ah! Capital!" said Martin. "That wants a bit of getting, capital does."

Clearly he had not understood a word of what Casey was talking about. He had his own idea of London, and was not going to change it or admit the possibility of change. From one year's end to the other he never left the mews. His yard might actually be filled with motor-cars, but for him it was really a sanctuary of the 'orses. Their smell still clung about it. The one horse he had left had little else to do but provide the smell.

However, he liked Casey, and was distressed to find him taking to ideas:

"Don't you go worrying your head about what is and is not, Casey. Heads wasn't made for that. Heads was made to have eyes in, and mouths, the same as 'orses. All you got to do, all any man's got to do, is to earn his keep and pay his shot, same as a 'orse. When he's done that, 'e's got to behave nice to them as is in stable with him. And every now and then he gets his little canter and may be turned out to grass."

"I'm no Nebuchadnezzar," retorted Casey, "and I want to be on my own."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"No man can be on his own if he ain't got no capital."

"That's what I've been saying."

"Ah!" said Martin mysteriously, to baffle Casey's obstinacy. "Ah! that wants getting, that does. If it was 'orses now——"

Casey saw that it was hopeless. Nothing would budge the fat man from his yard. Cars! They were a necessary evil, not to be encouraged beyond the limit of necessity.

Ann wanted to know more about René, but Casey could tell her nothing. He repeated his eulogy of young Fourmy's skill as a driver, and added:

"We've got has-been gentlemen on the ranks, scores of them. But they're not like him. It's a treat to hear him talk, it is. They wanted him, a lot of them did, to pitch into the union, but he doesn't seem to think much of trade-unions. He says they can't do anything yet, in the way of fighting I mean, because they want to make us all middle-classes, and that ain't good enough. If I could get him to go along with me!"

Ann said:

"He hasn't been home all day. Didn't he say anything to you?"

"He did say one day: 'I'm getting sick of this, carting men and women like cattle.' It seems to have got on his nerves a bit. Too good for it, I suppose."

"It would be a good thing," said she, "if we went into the country, though I don't know what I'd do. I do love London and all the lights and that, and the shops."

## SETTLEMENT

Said Casey:

"You should see the nights in Africa. Some parts you can walk a hundred miles and never see a light. Nothing but stars, and fewer of them than we have here. Flat and empty as the sea some of the country, going on forever and ever in the darkness."

Ann shivered:

"Ugh!" she said. "It makes me think of Renny. I don't know why. He'd like it, I think."

"Yes. I think he likes big things."

It was late. Near twelve o'clock. The lamps in the mews flickered as Ann returned to her rooms. The post had brought a note from René, posted in the north of London. He said: "Please tell old Martin I shall be away three days. I will come back then. I think I have it all settled in my mind. I want to get it clear for you, too. You have been so good to me, my dear, and I owe you so much.—R."

There was also a letter for him. She struggled against the desire to open it, and conquered it for that night. The next morning, however, the temptation was too strong for her, and she steamed it open. It was from a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh to say that the late Miss Janet Fourmy had left René the residue of her estate, which, after certain small legacies had been paid, would amount to nearly four thousand pounds. The house in Scotland would also be his, and all the deceased lady's personal effects.

Ann went to her work that day shivering with excitement. René's enormous wealth frightened her. She could put up a fight against his intelligence, his

## YOUNG EARNEST

brooding, his silence; but against this she felt powerless, and knew within her heart that her battle was already lost.

She was a forewoman now, and she gave the girls under her the worst day they ever remembered.



BOOK THREE

CATHLEEN BENTLEY

So between them love did shine  
That the truth saw his right  
Flaming in the phoenix' sight,  
Either was the other's mine.

Property was thus appalled  
That the self was not the same;  
Single nature's double name  
Neither two nor one was called.

# I

## MEETING

He trieth the sea after many shipwrecks; and beats still on that door which he never saw opened.

WHEN Ann and Kilner left René, he was filled with anger against them, first of all, fleetingly, with the petulance of a sick man at being left alone without his having expressed a wish for it, and then at their treating him as a sick man when he was nothing of the kind, but only passing through a crisis in which not even sympathy could help him much. Kilner was so cocksure just because he had a peculiar delight in putting paint on canvas; and Ann—poor dear little Ann!—she loved to have things and people at her mercy and to keep them there. And she could make no attempt to understand them, because if she did so, that would be to believe in them and let them be free to work out their own destiny. He knew how little freedom she would even grant himself, and his mind, spurred by revolt, into high activity, went straight to its mark, the place where freedom most clearly promised—absurdly, the door through which he had seen Rachel Bentley pass. That led to his clearest and most beautiful memory, the days in Scotland, the

## YOUNG EARNEST

happy boyhood when delight had grown from year to year, to flower at last in the coming of Cathleen. Very vivid was his recollection of their first meeting in his aunt's house: himself very coltish and shy, she charmingly self-conscious and alert. It was the first year the Bentleys had taken the big house, and she had come round by the road. His aunt had asked him to show Cathleen the short cut through the woods. She chattered until his shyness overcame him, and then they walked in a miserable silence. He comforted himself by regarding her as a little girl, which to his young prudishness made his involuntary adoration of her beauty legitimate. He could never take his eyes off her, and she began to amuse herself with him and try her coquetries upon his oversensitiveness. He suffered terribly. She was caught in her own wiles, and she too suffered. It was a relief to both when, the first year, they parted.

The next year she was not so lovely, and had lost or disguised her wildness. It was not long before he discovered that he could rouse it in her. Then began their meetings in the woods.

At the thought of her now his affection for Ann, his warm regard for Kilner faded away. They were meaningless without her. He knew not where she was. His only clue was Rachel. Cathleen, too, might go to that house. He would wait until she came. If the worst came to the worst, he would ask Rachel. He must satisfy himself that he was not covering that sweet past with illusions. The meeting with Rachel had brought it all flooding back to bring him to acute



## MEETING

discontent with the present. It was one thing to sigh sentimentally over happy days. To do that was to obscure them. It was quite another thing to have happy days demanding egress through his life, growing through the thick-set years like a tree through a wall.

He stole away directly Kilner and Ann were out of sight, found he had only a sovereign, and turned into the tobacconist's round the corner for change. It was also a news-agent's, and he bought a newspaper and, as he was borne along by the bus, read of his aunt's death. Strange, he thought, that all his thoughts should be clustered round her house just then. The wise old woman, with her dear foibles: what had her long life been? The end of it was sweet and true and full of grace. Not only his mother had been helped in her troubles. That he knew. The old lady's meager income became supple and elastic under the touch of generous charity that never spoiled its gifts with the demand for gratitude. She once said to René: "Better be ungrateful than cramped with gratitude." Read Dante upside down she might in her old age, but she could quote him from her heart:

Ed io a lui; Io mi son un che, quando  
Amor mi spira, noto, ed a quel modo  
che ditta dentro, vo significando.

She had made René learn a little Italian and get that by heart. It began now to have a meaning for him, and he repeated it to himself as he came near the road in which stood Rachel's house.

## YOUNG EARNEST

He took up his stand at the corner and waited. He had been there nearly an hour when a car drove up and a spruce, middle-aged gentleman got out, walked up the path, and admitted himself with a key. Rachel's husband? Far too old for her.

Another hour's waiting. A young woman came along the road. René thought for a moment it was she, and his heart leaped. She did not see him. She turned in at the gate, knocked at the door, and was admitted. No, he decided, that was not Cathleen.

Then he told himself he was a fool, that only by the unlikeliest chance would she be there to-day. He walked away, but was back again in ten minutes. In another twenty the door opened and the young woman came out. She stood for a moment at the gate. It could not be Cathleen, she was too tall and slender. In his eager hope and curiosity he moved toward her. He was not a yard away from her when she turned and their eyes met. Neither stirred. They were stilled by the wonder of it. A spell was on them, and slowly in both grew the dreadful knowledge that a word or a gesture would break it. In his heart René prayed: "Oh! let it break into happiness," and his will leaped into being and decided that it must be so and he laughed. She said:

"Oh! René!"

It was no echo of the old cry, but the same filled with a new music.

Their hands met in the conventional salute. She said:

"I have been thinking of you so much."

## MEETING

"Much?" said he. "I have been thinking of nothing else. And I was not sure that it was you when you went in just now."

"I saw you, but I didn't recognize you. Rachel told me she had met you."

"Did she tell you where?"

"I had to dig it out of her. She was very hushed and secret. Rachel is funny. I've been looking at taxi-drivers ever since. They are a very plain lot of men."

"Where do you live now?"

"In Bloomsbury. I am working for my living, you know."

"I'm glad of that, but I shouldn't have thought it necessary."

"My father died."

"I heard that."

"He left nearly all his money to another woman: another family. I suppose he liked them better than us. I had a row with my mother over it. It appears she knew all about it and never minded. Only when it came to her having less money than she thought, she developed a horrid conscience and denounced my father to us. I hadn't thought about such things, but I was fond of my father, and it wasn't fair to vilify him after his death. I didn't understand it in the very least, but I stood up for him, and of course I said a lot of stupid, cruel things. I went to see the other woman. She was quite old, older than mother, rather vulgar, but jolly and warm-hearted and kind, and, from the way she talked, I could see she really did love

## YOUNG EARNEST

my father and was very proud of him. You know, he made his own way. His father was a barber in Rickham, in Hertfordshire. She came from there, too. I told mother I had seen her, and she was furious, and said I was too young to know anything about such things. I pointed out that she had told me, and she declared she never imagined that I would understand. Then she put it all down to my taste for low company, meaning you. That annoyed me, and I told her you were a very learned and brilliant person. She said Thrigsby wasn't a real university, and its degrees did not count. You weren't a gentleman, and it was terrible how all the professions were being invaded by little whipper-snappers with a thin coating of book knowledge. So I asked her point-blank why she married my father, and she said he was extremely successful. Father had left us each two hundred pounds. I asked for that, and said I would earn my own living. I should have a year in which to look round. She said no one would ever marry me if I worked. I told her that the little I had learned of her life didn't make me anxious to be married. She became very solemn on that, and told me I couldn't possibly remain unmarried, because I was too pretty. I said I thought women could look after themselves, and obviously other arrangements were possible, and sometimes more profitable. That was an odious thing to say, but we had irritated each other out of all decency, and for vulgarity the other woman was an angel to us. I couldn't stay with my mother; I had said too much. She knew if I stayed it would make it hard for her to



## MEETING

play the devoted widow; and also, if she could be the broken-hearted parent, it would give her a good start. She pounced on that, and let me go with her most lugubrious blessing and most ghoulish doubts. She prophesied almost gleefully that I would go to the bad, and helped me along by treating me as if I had already done so. Then I plunged into the wicked world. It was very disappointing. I had been led to suppose that no woman was safe alone. The wicked world has absolutely disregarded me. Occasionally some miserable little man or pale-faced boy has sidled up to me in the street and said, 'Excuse me, miss'—or 'Haven't we met before?' They don't alarm me. I say I won't excuse them or that I haven't met them, and they look very comically cast down, and say 'Beg pardon' and shuffle off. Sometimes I am so sorry for them that I feel inclined to run after them and tell them to cheer up, because it's quite easy to find affection if you only set about it the right way. They think it's adventure they want, but it isn't. It's only affection, some sort of human contact. I understood that, because I too was lonely. But those poor little men were so dull. I can't bear being dull, and I hate to see it in others; I hate to see them settling down to it. That's what mother wanted me to do. I might have done it, too, if father hadn't died. You know it seems quite pleasant to flirt and spend money, and find a husband and go on flirting and spending money. I'd never seen anyone die before, and it did make me feel ashamed. All of us were changed by it for a little. We became very shy of each other, and wanted to be nice, and

## YOUNG EARNEST

began to talk about the things we really thought and felt inside ourselves. Then all that slipped away, and we were just the same as before until we talked about father's money, and then we were all angry. I suppose I hadn't quite recovered from the strain of his death, because all that hurt me, and I could only think that I had really loved him, and might have loved him much more if things had been somehow different. And then when I saw that kind, common woman it opened up another kind of life going on apart from money and position and amusement, all the things we were so proud of. It horrified me at first, of course. It is dreadful because it is secret. In itself— Well, anyhow, the only other thing in my life that was the least bit like it and could stand against it was my absurd little affair with you in Scotland. So you see, I had begun to think of you even before Rachel met you."

"Absurd!" René winced at the word.

"Wasn't it? I couldn't have gone on with it, you know. It made me feel so helpless, and I felt so mean, letting you care so much. Your letters used to frighten me."

"But you cared for me?"

"Yes, yes; with one eye on you and the other on my mother."

René thought that over uneasily. He was disconcerted by this cool young woman. The enchantment of their meeting had roused and invigorated him, and, as usual, he had surrendered to the emotional flux of the encounter and was prepared for wonders, which, as

## MEETING

usual, did not come, or, at least, were not palpable. His eyes never left her face. It was lit with a smile of happiness, an incommunicable joy.

Unconscious of their surroundings they had reached Kensington Gardens, and stood by the railings outside the Palace looking over the Round Pond. A gray October day: the trees gaunt and shabby; the heavy clouds tumbled and ragged. A cold northwest wind was blowing. René's ungloved hands were blue.

He gripped Cathleen's arm, and she turned her happy eyes on him.

"That's good," she said. "You were so strong then."

"Cathleen, I mustn't lose sight of you again. You make me forget everything that has been, though that isn't quite what I wanted to say."

"I shan't lose sight of you, my dear. It doesn't matter what happens to either of us."

René said:

"A good deal has happened to me."

"Tell me."

He told her. She received his story in silence. At last she said:

"If you have a friend, it doesn't matter what he does. All the same, it's a nuisance."

"What is?"

"The nuisance is that I'm a woman and you're a man. Can friendship get over that?"

"Love," said René, "can master everything. I love you. Shall we start with that? That's clear, anyhow."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"Clear? Oh, yes; but it means being very certain about it and definite. Some of the charm of love goes. It is gone already from me."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't. I'm trying not to pity you. Oh, René, my foolish dear, I only want to love you and help you."

"It is you who are strong," he said.

She moved closer to him, so that she could just touch him.

"We shall need all the strength we can get if we are not to be broken—strength and patience."

"I have a friend," said he, "who thinks that all the confusion comes from sloth and fear."

"I should like to meet that friend."



## II

### HAPPINESS

Human lack of power in moderating and checking the emotions I call servitude. For a man who is submissive to his emotions is not in power over himself, but in the hands of fortune to such an extent that he is often constrained, although he may see what is better for him, to follow what is worse.—SPINOZA'S *Ethics*.

CATHLEEN lived in Bloomsbury with a friend of hers, a Miss Cleethorpe, who managed a hostel for young women, clerks, schoolmistresses, shop girls. René took her there after their long conversation in Kensington Gardens, and then, feeling the impossibility of going back to Mitcham Mews, went up to Kentish Town to see his friend the sandy-haired railway porter. He had visited him once before, about a year ago, and could think of no one else with whom he might take refuge. The little man was delighted to see him:

"It's the sleeper!" he cried. "Lord! I've often wondered if you'd go off again, and when you told me you were in the taxi-driving, I said to myself: 'Well, that'll keep him awake.' "

Yes. He would be glad to let him have a bed. Wanting to sleep, eh? He often felt like that himself:

## YOUNG EARNEST

day after day, day after day, working, and the suburban traffic growing so fast that they couldn't put on enough trains, and the station morning and evening was like Bedlam.

"London," he said, "is not what it was when I first came to it. I used to know all the regular gentlemen. But now—well, I tell you, they don't have a nod for anyone. A bee-line for the city in the morning, and a bee-line for home in the evening. It makes you feel small, it does."

René sympathized with him. His days also had been devoted to impersonal service, and he had known the humiliation of it.

Now his only desire was to see Cathleen again. To taste once more the vigor and keen energy with which her presence filled him. The thought of her was not enough. It roused a flood of emotion too strong for his unpracticed control. He warmed to the idea of her beauty. When he was with her her beauty was axiomatic, food for rejoicing without disturbance, a mere accident, one to be thankful for, yet no more than a light bidding to the thrilling pursuit of her elusiveness.

He had arranged to see her the next day in the evening. She worked as secretary in an Art School and was not free until after five. He spent the day in happy brooding over the coming delight of seeing her, and preparing with boyish dandyism for it. He had his hair cut and his chin shaved (he had grown a moustache), and he bought a clean shirt and collar. In a book shop he saw the anthology from which they had

## HAPPINESS

read together and could not resist going in and buying it. He was ashamed of himself when he had done that, and hid it away among the railway porter's rather strange collection of books—More's *Utopia*, *The Master Christian*, *Marcus Aurelius*, some books of Edward Carpenter's, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, and *Arsène Lupin*.

Cathleen received him in her little bed-sitting-room at the top of the big grim house, which smelled of food, ink, and washing. She had made her den very pretty, and he recognized a picture he had given her long ago, and one or two trinkets that her mother had had in her boudoir in Scotland. The walls were of plain brown paper, and there were gay-colored stuffs by the windows and on the sofa.

She took in his spruceness at a glance, was pleased by it, and laughed.

"I must give you a buttonhole," she said, "as I used to do. You look so wonderfully the same."

René trembled as she came to him and pinned a flower in his coat.

"Sit down," she said. "I think we can talk better here."

René sat awkwardly on the sofa, she by the fire, which she stirred with the poker.

"Well," she said, "I feel rather a beast. I couldn't help flirting with you a little yesterday. That's got to stop."

"Were you—flirting?"

"I was."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I thought you were glad to see me—as glad as I was to see you."

"I was glad. I'd been having a foolishly miserable time. Living in this house is rather terrible with nothing but women, unmarried women. You don't know. They come here young, many of them from the country. Then they go out to work in the day and come in in the evening. They haven't enough money to pay for amusements. They're too respectable to look for fun in the streets. They hardly dare have a man-friend, the others are so jealous, so rigid, so uncomprehending."

René said:

"I had a feeling that my presence here was an offense."

Cathleen laughed:

"That's why I asked you. I thought it would do them good to see you. It did me so much good. I think I was getting infected by it. Lotta, my friend, escapes into the country now and then. She has a cottage. I go too sometimes, but her consolations are not mine. She has a garden and makes jams and fruit-wines. I want something more than that. I don't want to console myself until I have to. If I were going to do that I might just as well have stayed with my mother. On the other hand, I don't want to flirt with you, my friend. It wouldn't be fair to you."

"What do you want, then?"

"I want to be able to assume that we love each other. We can be frank then. It sounds uncomfortably intellectual, I know, but that will be less disastrous than



## HAPPINESS

being uncomfortably emotional. You used to think about these things. You made me think. You haven't stopped?"

"No. No. But I have such a longing for simplicity. I don't know why there is all this fuss made about love."

"Because people will exploit the first excitement of it. Blake said:

He who catches a joy as it flies  
Lives in eternity's sunrise."

"I don't know about that," said René. "All I know is that I don't want to let you go."

"But you may have to. We had a wonderful thing yesterday. We may not be able to rise to it again."

"I don't care about that. I want *you*."

"Only because we had that moment yesterday."

"I don't know why it is."

"But I know and I care, and I want to keep the memory of it. I don't mind it's being darkened by circumstances, if it must be, but I do mind it's being spoiled by our own weakness. Men are always girding at women for caring about nothing but love. They may gird fairly when we are untrue to love and let men belittle it with their impatience and arrogance. I ought not to say that to you, because you have tried, and I have done nothing but argue with myself."

"I think you have found something which I have not even begun to see."

"And argued about it."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I don't see what else you could do."

Cathleen thrust silently at the fire and said savagely:

"Oh! don't you? I thought I was going to be so free with my two hundred pounds. Free, to do what? Walk in suffrage processions, break windows, insult policemen. I was free to do what I liked, but I liked nothing very much. I was too fastidious and could not take what came. Things did come. They lacked this or that necessary for my satisfaction. When my money was gone I had to creep into shelter away from the freedom I did not know how to use, and ask for work to keep myself alive, just like the girls and women in this house, who keep themselves alive for nothing, so far as I can see, except the pleasure of being tired and bored and malicious. I was in a bad way, René, when I met you. I used to go to Rachel, who is the only one of the family who will have anything to do with me, and sometimes I envied her in her stupid, unhappy comfort. She doesn't get on with her husband, but she has a nice house and two children who alternately infuriate and amuse her. That was impossible for me. I'd hate it, just living with a man to keep a household together. But then even now I've hated the alternative I had arrived at, this being huddled away with a lot of useless women. Working women! A genteel occupation to support a genteel existence. The selfishness of it! People like to pretend that motherhood solves everything for a woman. It may give occupation to a dependent woman, but why should it destroy her selfishness any more than another physical fact? If she insists on it too much,

## HAPPINESS

it cannot do anything but accentuate her selfishness. Women can be just as greedy about motherhood as about eating or drinking or love, and they can just as easily spoil it with overindulgence. Don't look so unhappy, René. I'm not arguing with you. I've had to think so much, and for months I haven't had a soul to talk to like this. Even Lotta has her world so shaped and trim (she's efficient, you see) that all my doubts and wonderings are just an annoyance to her, though no one could be kinder. I don't know what I should have done without her. It was such a comfort to find a woman working really well, without insisting that hers is the only way of living, and doing good without wanting to be thankful for it. She made me patient. When you have decided what you do not wish to do, you are apt to think anything different must be better. You're not sorry you made the ordinary career impossible for yourself?"

"Sorry?" said René, puzzled. "It was never a thing to be sorry about or glad about. It just happened and I felt better. And now I have met you and everything is changed again. I didn't go to my home last night."

"No?"

"I went to an old friend of mine who lives happily and contentedly. I wanted to see happiness and contentment. Somehow you had made me sure of myself, and I felt that everything was changed. But the change was in myself. In nearly everybody I have been more conscious of the things they lack than of the things they have. I had been bolstering myself up

## YOUNG EARNEST

with contempt—for myself as well as everything else. It was that or being sorry for myself. Always a struggle. I can't see it clearly yet: like fighting without weapons and without a cause. I had no desire to live irregularly and uncomfortably or to come in conflict with accepted opinion as to conduct. But I don't see why opinion should be antagonistic to a man's private affairs. I wasn't antagonistic. I was only doing confusedly what I felt very clearly and had always felt to be right. I feel certain now that I ought to have done so long before. I'd like to explain that to all sorts of people, except that honestly I can't take much interest in it. I had a vague sickening feeling that the end of the world had come, but that was only because I could not see an inch before me. The end of the world did not come, neither for me nor for—her. It seems stupid to be explaining all this to you. I know you will not think I am excusing myself, because I am sure you accept me as I am——”

“Theoretically,” said Cathleen, looking up at him with a quick smile. “You see, I have lived on theory, not my own, either; Lotta's. And I don't know whether my theory can hold out against your practice, any more than my sentimental girlish fictions could. You upset them, you know, and you are just as disconcerting as ever. Shall you go on with your work?”

“I can't think of anything else I should like so well.”

“And that girl?”



## HAPPINESS

"That's what we have both been thinking about all the time."

"Yes."

Cathleen rose and walked over to the window and looked out. She stood then for so long that René followed her and laid his hand on her shoulder. The window gave on to a row of back gardens with a few trees, black and bare. Opposite was a lighted window through which could be seen four girls sewing—stitch, stitch, stitch.

"I have often watched them," said Cathleen, "and wondered what might be in their lives. Desire? Religion? Love? What is it makes it possible for them to work so mechanically and so happily."

"Fun," said René. "They want fun, spiced with the risk of having to pay for it."

"Is she like that?"

"She was. But there is something more."

"There would be," said Cathleen. "She couldn't love you without being moved out of herself and the habits of her class. That is why I am sorry for her. Are you going back to her?"

"Not yet."

"I think you ought to write to her."

"I was waiting until I had seen you again, and made quite sure——"

"And you are sure now?"

"I feel now that we shall always be together, gazing out on the world."

"And finding it so wonderful."

They were silent then, and in each for other was

## YOUNG EARNEST

the same song of life and love, a music passing thought and understanding. So they remained for a time that was no time, hardly conscious of their bodies whose slight contact gave them strength for flight. Easily they ranged back in spirit to their youth, and caught up its sweetness and melody.

They were broken in upon by Miss Cleethorpe, a pale, gray-haired lady whose eyes smiled kindly amusement at their helplessness. Bringing help to the helpless and forcing them to help themselves was the whole practice of her life. Lovers, dogs, indigent young women, were the material in which she worked.

She was presented to René, and gave him a grip of the hand that startled him with its vigor. Turning to Cathleen, she said:

"The girls have sent up a deputation to me to say you have had a man in your room for the last two hours, that it is against the rules, and that it is not quite proper. Ten minutes they could have overlooked. I said that Mr. Fourmy was a very old friend, and that I knew all about it, but they insisted that I must come and chaperone you, and here I am. Speaks well for my authority, doesn't it?"

René was so distressed at the thought of the young women contemning Cathleen that he was almost speechless. He muttered that he must go.

"You mustn't go," said Lotta, "before I have thanked you for what you have done for Cathleen. She came home last night looking perfectly radiant—and look at her now." (She had turned up the lights.)

## HAPPINESS

Cathleen was standing with her hands lightly clasped in front of her, her head thrown back, her lips parted, and in her eyes a golden tenderness. She smiled and shook her head slowly, and came to her friend and kissed her. Lotta put her arms round her and hugged her.

"You two poor sillies," she said, "what a heavy burden you have shouldered."

René grinned:

"I don't feel the weight of it," he said.

Lotta gazed full at him. He met her eyes, searching him.

"Are you going back to your stables?" she asked.

"I want two more days of this."

"Would you like to take it down to the country? There's a west wind blowing over my hills, and winter is coming in."

Like children, René and Cathleen gazed at each other in surprised delight.

### III

#### THE WEST WIND

Days, that in spite  
Of darkness, by the light  
Of a clear mind are day all night

**N**ORTHWEST of London there are hills, where the air is eager and the upper winds are caught in woods as they come cloud-bearing from the wild sky. Often the winds fling clouds about the hills and leave them entangled in the woods. Such a cloud they had left on the Saturday morning when Lotta Cleethorpe brought René and Cathleen to her retreat, an old white cottage on the border of a long common brown with dead heather, orange with wet withered bracken, olive-green with the gorse and the close-cropped grass under the gray mist. Out of this, as they drove from the station, loomed trees and haystacks and houses. A public-house and a church stood at the end of the common. Soon they passed a blacksmith's shop with the bellows in full blast, the sparks flying and the smith's huge arms and swart face lit up by the red glow. There came out the merry clink of hammers on the anvil, and then the hiss of the red-hot metal plunged into water.



## THE WEST WIND

René said:

"The beginning of it all."

"Of what?" asked Lotta.

"Modern life." And he found himself thinking of Kurt, who had just added to his laurels the first prize in a race to Berlin.

They reached Lotta's cottage. Apple-trees stood by the gate, a clipped box-tree by the door. A sheep-dog came bounding along the road, cleared the gate, and pawed frantically at Lotta until she crouched and he could lay his forelegs on her shoulders and lick her face in a frenzied greeting.

"He lives at the public-house when I am not here, but he refuses to regard it as anything but lodgings. Down, Sammy! You know Cathleen. Say How do to Mr. Fourmy."

Sammy cocked his head, looked the other way, and lifted his paw. René shook it. The dog returned to his mistress, who said:

"I can't keep my hands off the garden. It has got into such a dreadful state. You two had better go for a walk. You'll find toadstools in the woods and there may be a few blackberries left."

She gave them a basket and sent them forth.

When they came to the woods, René said:

"It wants only the river and I could believe that we had never lost each other for a single day. There were just such mists then: the same drip in the trees, the same mysterious shrouding of the life of the woods."

They wandered for miles, happy, hardly conscious of each other in the joy they shared. The mist clung

## YOUNG EARNEST

about their hair, their eyebrows, and whipped up the color in their cheeks and made their eyes to shine. Each new path they came to was a promise of adventure, and always in color and mystery and the play of light the woods fulfilled that promise. René jumped all the stiles and teased Cathleen because she was only a woman and could not do the same, and she pointed out that men needed to do extravagant things like jumping stiles or they became flabby, whereas women had a more instinctive economy and were physically more subtle.

"Women," said René, "are ridiculous."

"From a man's point of view. No more ridiculous than a man from a woman's point of view. The absurdity disappears when they love each other. Then male extravagance and feminine subtlety are only incidentals——"

"Wise young woman."

"I'm a fraud really, René. It's pure Lotta. She was trained as a doctor, you know, and really has watched people. I only guess."

"That's my trouble, too. I only feel quite sure when I reach a certain stage of emotion."

"I never feel quite sure. Nor does Lotta. How can anyone? She says she has observed certain things. She says men and women only make love to each other as a rule because they love each other so little that they have nothing else in common."

"And you and I——?"

"Have everything."

René laughed.

## THE WEST WIND

"Except the power to jump stiles."

"Oh! I love to see you do it."

"And I love to see your inability."

"We both get over it. That is all that matters."

"That's a hard, common-sensible woman."

They reached a place where the trees—beech, pine, and larch—came marching up a steep hill, so steep that they could see over the tops of the trees out to the plain beneath. The mists wreathed and broke. A pale blue sky shone through them, and the sun cast pale yellow lights. Cathleen began to sing as they plunged down the hill. René started to run, could not stop himself, and went tearing down, shouting like mad until he was brought up by a wide ditch. There he turned and watched Cathleen threading her way through the trees, singing. The wind came roaring, whispering and muttering through the leaves, and the trees swayed and moaned. Cathleen came running the last few yards, and he caught her. She held up her laughing face and they kissed, and the wind seemed to sweep through them and set them swaying like the trees. Their blood raced in their glee.

On the way back they gathered blackberries, and in a green clearing in the woods they found mushrooms. Happy they were to take such treasure back to Lotta, their friend, who had made such wonders possible for them.

She had supper ready for them, the lamp and the fire lit, the curtains drawn in the cozy kitchen. After they had eaten, they sat with cigarettes and coffee and peppermints round the fire.

## YOUNG EARNEST

Lotta said:

"I knew you would find what you wanted here. I think all lovers should bring their love to the earth and let the wind know that it is there. How can you love in streets and houses? They drive the sweetness out of it and keep it unnaturally excited. I have seen so much of that. Women especially are so house-conscious. They hate everything in love which threatens their pride of possession and position. They live so jealously that they want jealousy even in their love——"

"Thank you," said René.

"For what?"

"For being so frank. I never was in a house before where there was no oppression in the atmosphere."

"The house is so much happier since I came to it. It was occupied before by an old woman who never set foot outside the door for thirty years. We talk abusively about life in London, but life in villages is even more sordid. Country people live even more meanly and graspingly than townsfolk. There is more stagnation. They are all inbred. The people here are all married to cousins, and they are queer in the head and abnormal. Personally, I think the great towns grew out of the necessity for breaking all that up. English life was far too like a novel by Emily Brontë. It had to be broken up and readjusted. It was much more that than the desire for money. You are both such children that you have hardly had time to realize the kind of life in which you were brought up. You have both shaken free of it with the violence that



## THE WEST WIND

makes one so hopeful of the younger generation. When you are as old as I am, you will be able to realize far more than I have done. The readjustment will be more nearly completed. The reaction from the evils of industrial life will be even more violent than the reaction from those of agrarian life. You will know how rare love is, and you will rejoice that it was given to you to feel it, even though, as it must not, it were to end to-night." She turned to René and smiled at him with her soft eyes. "Cathleen has told me."

"Yes," he said. "I seem to have floundered into being forced to live my own life in my own way."

"Cathleen too. You can only do it together. Neither of you could put up with a mate who desired less and regarded every emotion as a bond instead of a liberation. Love is the release of the spirit or it is not love."

"And if others are to be unhappy?"

"That is their affair. You don't seem to have let that worry you much until now."

"I never saw things so clearly before. There came a crisis, and I just plunged blindly. I have a horror of doing that again."

"But I don't think you'll ever mind making a fool of yourself, René. You never did," said Cathleen.

"Perhaps not, my dear, but I should hate to make a fool of you."

"Everyone," said Lotta, "makes mistakes. It isn't everyone who will admit them. Once they are admit-

## YOUNG EARNEST

ted they often turn out extremely profitable. Really I don't see that you two need have any but financial anxiety, and that is easily surmounted. Marriage? Neither of you has a scrap of conventional religion. You can't possibly be worried by scruples. Really the marriage laws of this country are in such a mess that it has become almost a duty for decent people to transgress them. They won't be altered in our time, so there is nothing for it but to disregard them. You have quite enough real difficulties to face without troubling yourselves about artificial ones. A few virtuous people won't know you? What are they to you or you to them?"

"It all comes back," said Cathleen, "to that girl."

"She took her risks. She knew that. They have courage, some of those girls."

"Is courage," asked René, "all that is necessary?"

"I think so. It is only lack of courage that has made rules of conduct and religious maxims and precepts—crutches and props. We're all very stupid at conduct, but if we live by rule and habit there is no hope of our getting any better."

"But you have rules for your hostel."

"I always allow them to be broken when there is anything to be gained by it. I love defiance, but I hate slyness. Rules must be broken, they must not be evaded. But we are beginning to talk for the sake of talking, and Cathleen is nearly asleep. I'm glad you have had a good day."

"Such a day," he said, "as I never had. I seem to have found that for which I have always been search-

## THE WEST WIND

ing, and it has made everything valuable, even those things that I have most hated."

"I hope," said Lotta, "that you don't think you have arrived<sup>a</sup> at any conclusion. It is impossible to decide anything about life. It is possible only to live—sometimes."

They went to bed very early. The wind had risen to a gale and screamed in the chimneys and the eaves.

Hardly had René sunk into sleep, the quick easy slumber of health and peace, than he was roused by a fearful din. Leaping out of bed, he ran to the window and opened it. The wind came rushing in upon his bare chest and made him gasp for breath. Out on the road was a crowd of men armed with rattles, tin cans, kettles, baths, which they banged and whirled in the air as they marched solemnly up the road to the next cottage. There they moved slowly up and down, making a terrible noise and chanting:

There's evil enough between wind and water  
Without your tumbling of the farmer's daughter.  
Do you hear Billy Bows behind the door?  
There's no honest girl shall be a whore,  
    With a billy, billy, billy,  
    Billy blow.

They kept this up for a couple of hours in the wind and the rain, until at last with three groans and hoots they broke up and trailed off into the darkness.

René asked Lotta next morning what they might be doing, and she told him that the man in the cottage

## YOUNG EARNEST

was an unpopular character who had been annoying and molesting a girl in the village.

"That is public opinion. They wouldn't have minded if he had been a popular man, or a rich man. They would have blamed the girl in that case."

Lotta was staying on for a day or two. René took Cathleen back to London. He told her he was going to his work and Mitcham Mews and Ann.

"You heard what Lotta said?"

"About the noise last night and the girl?"

"Yes. I think it's true. Ann will be blamed by her own class."

"Would you like me to go and see her?"

"I don't know. I'll tell you that when I have got things straight with her—if I ever do."

"I can wait, René," she said. "Time doesn't seem to matter now. Isn't Lotta splendid?"

"Splendid!"

They shook hands as they parted, and each promised to write.



## IV

### EXPLANATION

Mais, hélas! quelle raison  
Te fait quitter la maison? . . .  
Et qu'est-ce que je puis faire  
Que je ne fasse pour toi?

**D**URING the three days of René's absence Ann did not speak to a soul. She found the comfort of mortification in reading the attorney's letter from Edinburgh. It made her feel hardly used, and that was pleasant. René had crept into her life under pretext of being at an end of his resources when he was incredibly rich. It was not fair: it was abominable. The grievance became such an obsession as to obscure her real dread and anxiety. In her almost crazy desire to defend herself against the alien power that was coming to him she tore up the letter and burned it. He would not know. She would keep him. She would get him to take her away. It was a good idea of Casey's. They would all go down into the country. Casey said there were cinemas in the country. Through the whole of the last night she sat brooding in the darkness. Every now and then she would pretend that he was there in the next room,

## YOUNG EARNEST

in the bed, and she would cling to this pretense until she had deceived herself and could almost believe that she heard him there. Yes. He was stirring in his sleep as he often did. She would go into the room and run her hand over the pillows. And her disappointment was a relief. It would have been terrible to have found him there when she knew he was away. Where was he? Whom was he with? Why didn't that beast Kilner know, since it was all that beast's doing, that sly hulk with his sarcastic way of speaking and his eyes that looked at you as if you were some sort of animal. It must be Kilner who had got him away. She brooded herself into hatred.

In the morning she watched the painter go out, and spat after him. Then she took a knife, went up to his room, found the picture on which he was working, and slashed it to ribbons.

"Naked women!" she cried as she cut away at the canvas. "Naked women! That'll teach the filthy brute."

It chanced that she was out when René returned, and he went up to Kilner's room in the hope of finding him. He saw the havoc that had been wrought, and understood who had done it. When the painter returned René was still trying to piece the canvas together. Without a word Kilner took it in his hands, and sat fingering it. He said:

"What luck! What infernal luck! I thought it was going to put me on my feet. One of the Professors had been down to see it and was excited about

## EXPLANATION

it. He thought he could get it sold for me. There's months of work in it."

"I shouldn't have thought——"

"I told you she hated me. I didn't think she'd be clever enough to know how to get back at me. Oh! they are clever, these women, in their own mean little way. Drudges, they are, and drabs. It's men like you, Fourmy, keep them so, asking them for love and taking the much they choose to give you, and when you sicken of it they take their revenge where they can."

"I never thought——"

"No. Damn you! You never do think. By God, I'd rather be the sort of fool to whom a woman is only a meal or a dinner. There's less mischief in that. What's the good of your emotions if you can't control them? You'd much better give it up like the rest of the world, shut yourself up in marriage to keep yourself out of harm's way. Who the devil are you, that you should claim in life the freedom an artist hopes to get in his art?"

There was enough truth in Kilner's denunciation to enrage René. He had felt so clear and confident, so sure of mastering the event of his evil, and all this bitterness had him once more throbbing and confused.

"What," he cried, "what does a work of art more or less matter? You can't expect the rest of us to live in filthiness so that you may paint pictures of a beauty that is never seen."

To have stung René into a hot fury seemed to

## YOUNG EARNEST

appease the artist somewhat. He grunted and said:

"In a way you're right, and honestly I don't care a hang about the picture. I can paint it again and better. But I thought I was going to make some money with it, enough to get out of this forever, and it is almost more than I can bear to know that the harm has come through you. It doesn't matter. I'll paint it again. I'll get the fierce little spark of intelligence burning in Eve. I'd left that out. I'll paint her feeling half confident of her superiority to both God and Adam, and ashamed of having to submit to their fatuous pretense of creation, their old theatrical trick. Art and religion! They stink of the harem and aphrodisiacs, the abominable East, the gods of lust and self-mortification. What has your trumpery idealism to say to that?"

He flung the tattered remains of the picture on the fire and held it down. The flames consumed the paint greedily and roared in the chimney.

"So much for that," said Kilner. "Finished! I'll start again to-morrow. Let's go and see your little vixen and annoy her by showing that she hasn't hurt us in the least."

"That's vindictive."

"Ho! Have you turned Christian?"

"I'm not going to have Ann moithered."

"And why not? She must learn her lesson."

"Let me find out why she did it first."

"I know why she did it. Because she thought I had taken you away from her."

"She can't have been jealous of you."



## EXPLANATION

"Women are always jealous of a man's men friends. They know his feeling can be just as strong for them without being weakened by sex. And they hate that—Now, a feeling fortified by sex—ah! but that doesn't happen."

"That," said René, "is exactly what has happened."

"Eh? To you?"

René nodded, and he told Kilner something of the walk in the west wind, the meeting with Cathleen, the deliverance it had brought to both of them.

"Does she know? Ann, I mean."

"No. I haven't seen her."

"She must have felt it. Poor little devil! No, I'll not see her. It's between you two—my rotten picture, Ann's rotten little dream of happiness, both destroyed. You look like a destroyer, my friend. It's in your eyes, your gestures, and movements. Absolute purpose, absolute desire. There's nothing else worth having."

"How absurd you are, Kilner. You turn everything into a picture as soon as you are interested in it at all. Purpose! I feel like a little schoolboy who has to interview his headmaster. I felt just the same once when I had been amusing myself with throwing paper out of the window. The headmaster saw it, but not the culprit. Then I was away from school ill, and the whole form got into trouble because no one would own up."

Kilner shouted with laughter:

"What a picture of the young Fourmy. Doing just what he wanted to do and evading the conse-

## YOUNG EARNEST

quences by luck. I bet it had all blown over by the time you got back."

"Oh, yes," said René, "but I confessed, and no one was very annoyed."

He went round to Ann's room with a sinking at his heart. She must be told, she must be made to understand, and she never would. He felt immeasurably older than she, responsible for her, and rather helpless. She was out. He gazed round at the room and was touched by its poverty and thriftlessness, the cheap little ornaments on the mantelshelf, the souvenirs of Margate and Southend, the cigarette cards pinned to the wall, to make, with a mirror, its only ornaments. Here they had sat, so many evenings, he and she, in a kind of playing at happiness. Here they had quarreled. Between quarreling and laughing they had spent all their days, laughing into quarrels, quarreling into tears, and out of them again laughing: the happy life of the poor, the workers, the thoughtless, whom no care could subdue, no joy uplift. What a relief that life had been to him when he had turned from that other life, where all his qualities were exploited and thought and power of expression were used only to sneak advantages, and even love and wedded happiness were valued only as possessions! How it had stripped him of all arrogance and cupidity of mind! The simple innocence of those who sell themselves for bread, and know nothing of the business for which they are used, and more despise than envy the shows in the production of which more than half their efforts are expended. Ann's scorn of

## EXPLANATION

"ladies," believing them all to be light women, her hatred of charity organization inspectors (she had routed them more than once when they meddled with Rita), Insurance Cards, and Old Age Pensions. She resented being underpaid, but even more she loathed the spirit which tried to supplement the underpayment with instruction in virtue made impossible by it, with doles and callous assistance. It had not escaped her that the motor-cars in the mews cost more to maintain than the income of any one of the families who lived above them. But she loved her little bare rooms, and if she were allowed to keep them and the happiness that filled them she asked no more. The brave independence: that was what René had prized in her, what was expressed in her room. He had contributed nothing to it but a little comfort, an easy chair, a few books, and his pleasure in her. He knew that she treasured that above everything in the world, and he must take it from her. He was shaken with cowardice and dread and pity—by pity most of all. That bound him to her, dragged him down. He had not expected it, so clear had everything seemed in the light of his healthful experience. And, he knew, pity from him would be to her of all things the most hateful. He could not shake free of it, and it absorbed him.

He heard her footsteps on the short flight of stairs. He was filled with a longing to escape. With her hand on the door he lost his head and fled into the inner room. He heard her go to the fireplace and sit in the easy-chair. She sat silently brooding. Then she heard him in the inner room. She had heard that before,

## YOUNG EARNEST

and he was never there. Slowly she came into the inner room, and he could just see her smoothing the pillows with her hands. She caught the sound of his breathing and stood stock-still. He could not move. She came toward him groping with her hands. She touched him.

"Renny, dear."

She was pressed close to him. Her arms went round his neck.

"I knew you'd come back."

He caressed her soothingly, gently, consumed and burning in his pity for her, and his terror lest she should discover it too suddenly.

He tried to draw her into the outer room, but she clung to him and kept him in the darkness, forcing him to feel her animal possession of him and hunger for him. Rage and the desire for self-preservation thrust back his pity and he carried her back to the outer room.

Then it was some moments before she could recover herself. She stood giggling and laughing nervously, almost hysterically.

"Renny, dear," she said, "you did say once we'd go off together. I want to. I want to. I'm sorry I went on working. I oughtn't to have done that. We ought to have had a house and me looking after it."

"You would have been even more unhappy."

"I'm not unhappy, Renny, dear. You've come back. And there's that coming——"

("She must be kept off that," he thought.)



## EXPLANATION

"Old Martin's been that kind," she said. "He says he'll see us through if it's money."

"I can make enough money," he replied, and then stopped, puzzled and startled by the malicious pleasure that came into her eyes. He leaned forward the better to see her, for the gas jet was flickering, and she turned away with a half smile that was exasperatingly silly.

"It isn't money," he said, "and you know it. I've seen Kilner."

She was instantly defiant on that.

"Well, and what had he to say for himself?"

"Nothing you would understand."

"Heuh! Clever, aren't you, you two, when you get your heads together."

She began to lay supper. "I'm hungry," she said. "I've not felt like eating while you've been away. Where you been?"

"Away," he answered. "Out of London."

"To your home?"

"No."

"I thought you'd have gone to your home."

"There's nothing to take me there. I've been with friends."

"Women?"

"Yes."

She had nothing to say to that. He went on:

"One of them I knew years ago, when I was a boy."

"That's not so long ago. A lady?"

"Yes."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"A lady wouldn't take up with you now."

"She works for her living."

"The same as me?"

"The same as you."

"Well. What of it?"

"We went down into the country, she and I and her friend."

"I don't want to know about that."

"But I want to tell you."

She stood by the table and her fingers drew patterns on the cloth.

"What is it you want to tell me?"

"I'm in love with her."

Ann's lips set in a hard line, and her eyes narrowed and her brows scowled.

"Did you come back to tell me that?"

"Yes."

"Why? Did you think I'd want to know?"

"I'm so sorry."

"Sorry, you devil? You came down to torment me. You'd better go, d'ye hear."

René could not move. He was fascinated by the suffering in the little creature, melted and weakened by his pity for her.

"You'd better go," she repeated. "And tell her you left a poor girl hating you, and see how she'll like that. Sorry! That's what you say when you step on a fellow's foot in a bus. Sorry! When you got a girl body and soul, and you throw her away like dirt."

"I came back."

"Yes. To tell me that. To tell me I was dirt, to

## EXPLANATION

throw me down for her to walk on so's she shan't get her feet wet."

She changed her tone and asked quietly:

"You knew her before me?"

"Long years before."

"Before that other one as you married?"

"Before that."

"And she's pretty and has pretty things?"

"I've told her about you."

"Oh! and she sent you back! Thank you for nothing."

"She did not. I came of my own accord. I couldn't leave you like that."

"I'd rather you did. I'd rather you did. My Christ! I can't bear to see you sitting there and talking and talking——"

He rose to his feet: "I can't leave you, Ann. I couldn't leave you like you are. . . ."

She leaned across the table and put out her hand.

"Look here, Renny. D'you love me?"

"Yes."

"Heh!" She gave a snarl of incredulity. "Heh! See here! D'you want me!"

Her eyes were staring at him cunningly, invitingly. He saw that she half believed his weakness would lead him to evasion or consent to her will. He waited, and made her repeat her question.

"D'you want me?"

"I want your happiness," he said. "I don't believe you will find it in me."

She was inarticulate. Her eyes closed and she

## YOUNG EARNEST

swayed. She jerked her head toward the door. He took that for a sign that he was to go, and moved round the table. She was before him, crouching, barring the way. Strangled sobbing sounds came from her throat. He stretched out his hands to implore her, to tell her of his almost intolerable pity. She sprang at him. She had a knife in her hand. He saw it flash, felt a burning pain in his breast, and fell. He could see her face twisted in an agony of fear close to his. Spittle from her lips fell upon his cheek. Her hands were busy at his breast. He lost consciousness.



## V

### THRIGSBY

Nothing I'll bear from thee  
But nakedness, thou detestable town!

**T**HAT was an appalling night. René lay with his wound roughly staunched. Ann crouched in the darkness by the bedside, fondling his hand, clinging to him, occasionally weeping. Both watched the light come creeping over the roofs and chimneys. Neither could say a word. Their eyes met, and hers were fixed hungrily on his face like a dog's that has been whipped for fighting. She looked so scared that he desired only to reassure her.

"Ann," he said.

She kissed his hand and fondled it, and pressed it to her cheek, and bathed it in her tears and kissed away the tears.

"You'd better fetch Kilner," he said. "He'll know what to do."

"Don't let him know how it happened. Don't let him know I did it."

"No. Go and fetch him."

"Oh! I thought you was dead. I thought you was

## YOUNG EARNEST

dead. Oh! Renny, dear, what should I ha' done if you'd been dead, my dear?"

"Go and fetch Kilner. He'll tell us what to do."

She brought Kilner and left them together. René made a clumsy attempt to shield Ann in a very incoherent account of the affair. Kilner saw through it but acquiesced in the intention.

"Can you move?" he asked.

"I think so."

"Can you walk to a doctor's? There's one just round the corner. Better than having him here. Some doctors talk. You'll be better out of this."

Leaning on Kilner's arm, René managed to reach the doctor's, but there he fainted. Kilner invented a story of an early morning street attack, and the doctor, who was not interested, swallowed it. He patched René up, gave him a prescription, and told him to call again that day. René disliked the man so much that he refused inwardly ever to go near him again. Between them they had half the fee, and promised to send round the rest.

Kilner made René comfortable in his room and was then sent off to find Miss Cleethorpe.

Lotta came at once. She and Kilner liked each other. Kilner had begun to see the affair in a humorous light. Anything to do with René was to him never very far short of absurdity.

"I wish I'd thought of it like that before," he said. "I'd never have let him go to her. I might have known he would make a mess of it. He was simply bursting with exaltation, and when he's like that it never occurs

## THRIGSBY

to him that other people may have a different view. I half believe he expected Ann to share his enthusiasm for the other lady——”

Lotta could not help laughing, though she protested: “What a shame!”

“I can’t help it,” said Kilner, “other people’s love affairs always are comic, and Fourmy—well, he is simply inappropriate in a community of creatures who live by cunning.”

“You’ve hit it,” replied Lotta. “I’ve been trying to understand what it was made him so exceptional. Creatures who live by cunning—— Thank you, Mr. Kilner.”

“All artists are like that. Cunning is no use in the pursuit of art. But they are insulated by their work as ordinary people are by convention and habit. No artist takes personal relationships seriously. They happen. He handles them well or makes a mess of them. It does not greatly matter. The ordinary being cannot appreciate any personal relationship until it is conventionalized and stripped of its vigor and value. Well—you have seen your Fourmy in action.”

“And well worth seeing too.”

Kilner told her what he could make of the new disaster, and how Ann had hated him and destroyed his work.

“I imagine,” he said, “that the same blind instinct operated against Fourmy. He’s creative also in a way. My pictures, his life, his precious romantic life, are both things slowly shaped out of chaos, and the creative process in a man is absolutely indifferent to

## YOUNG EARNEST

the stupid security most women value. Ann did her ridiculous little best to stop it in both of us."

"Poor girl," said Lotta, "I can imagine the two of you driving her distracted. After all, what she was going through was important to her."

"But only to her. She wanted it to be important for him. It couldn't be: it was quite meaningless."

"Nature is cruelly indifferent."

"If she weren't," said Kilner, "we should never have developed intelligence, let alone imagination."

"What are we to do with them?"

"I'll look after Fourmy if you'll take charge of Ann. Only, remember, you are not supposed to know that she did it, and, please, I have told you nothing about my picture."

The caution was unnecessary, for Ann tumbled out a full confession as she sank into the comfort of Lotta's kindness. She guessed at once who Lotta was, but was too exhausted for resentment. She had dragged herself off to her work in order to fill in the creeping hours.

Lotta said she was a friend of René's, and wished to help, and asked if there was anything she could do. Ann burst into tears and rolled her head from side to side, and cried:

"Oh! I wish I was dead, I do. I nearly did myself in last night when he lay there in the dark not saying a word. I wish I had—I wish I had. I never been so miserable. . . ."

Lotta comforted her as best she could, clumsily



## THRIGSBY

dropping a word in here and there as Ann poured out her confused narrative.

Ann kept on saying:

"He ought to have gone if he wanted to go."

"But he couldn't leave you like that——"

"It was seeing him again done it. I couldn't bear it, seeing him and knowing he was wanting to go."

"He was wanting you to feel that—that he was not going out of indifference to you."

"He doesn't want me. He said that."

"My dear child, you mustn't think about it like that. You must see that it is ended now."

"I'll never care for anybody again—not like that."

"Don't make things harder for yourself. How do you know?"

"You're only young once."

"Love is stronger when youth is gone."

Ann believed that. She wanted to believe in Lotta, and she sat very quietly, almost like a child, while the quiet, gentle woman tried to explain to her that René had taken nothing away, that their love must die for all it had lacked, that there was no disgrace in a failure to bring a love to life, that it was happening everywhere, every day, and that a dead love was the most horrible of prisons. And, said Lotta, if a child was to be born, it were better not to bring it into such captivity, better not to have the joy and beauty of motherhood spoiled by jealousy and disappointment in the failure of love. Ann wept anew. People were so kind, she said: there was Old Martin, and now there was Lotta; and she had only dreaded her loneliness of

## YOUNG EARNEST

being left alone to face "that." Lotta said there was no question of being left alone. If Ann liked, she could come to her hostel as maid, and when her time came she could go out to the country.

"I think," said Lotta, "that all children ought to be born and bred in the country. Don't you?"

"The mews," replied Ann, "is not much of a place for them."

She did not quite like the idea of being "in service," but Lotta explained that it did not necessarily mean for always. Once the baby was born and provided for, Ann could go back to her factory and take up her life, if she wished, where it was before René came into it.

"But I'll always want to hear about him," said Ann.

"Of course. He'll always want to hear about you."

"And see him."

"He'll want to see you too."

So it was arranged, and Ann promised to be at the hostel next morning.

When Lotta had gone, she sat down and wrote:

"DEAR RENNY,—I do want you to forgive me. I have been awful, but not without excuse. I do like Miss Lotta. She's been an angel to me and made me feel awfuller. I'm going to her. A letter for you to say you 'ad come into some money. I tore it up when I first began to feel bad toward you. I don't feel bad any more.—Your loving ANN."

This confession reached René at the same time as a letter from his brother George conveying the same

## THRIGSBY

news. The attorney in Edinburgh had written to say he had no reply from Mr. René Fourmy, and to ask for information as to his whereabouts. "This," said George, "has been a bit of a shock to us. We'd counted on something from the old lady. However, it makes a difference to you. If you feel inclined to come up and see us I'll be glad to have you. I suppose you'll give up the street-slogging. The old man has been in London. Did you see him?"

René announced his intention of going to Thrigsby. His mind was going back and back over his life in the attempt to understand it. If he could see George and his mother, he felt and hoped that he might be able to follow up the threads placed in his hands by his chance encounter with his father.

A day or two later saw him arriving at the Albert Station with his arm in a sling. George was there to meet him.

"Hullo, old sport," he said, "been in the wars?"

René told the lie invented by Kilner for the doctor.

"By Jove," said George, "you have been roughing it. I'll tell that to the youngsters in our office when they get dotty about Canada and the Wild West. Wild West of London, eh?" and he chuckled at his own joke.

"Elsie's quite excited," he said, as they boarded the Hog Lane tram.

"And mother?" asked René.

"Well. Hum. You'll find a difference in the mother."

## YOUNG EARNEST

René was struck by many changes. New warehouses, new rows of shops, some attempt to bring distinction into the architecture of the city, though, for the most part, nothing but ostentation was attained. They passed the university. There were new buildings there, more like an insurance office than ever. Streets that he remembered as respectable and prosperous had become slums swarming with grimy children. A great piece had been taken out of Potter's Park for the building of a hideous art gallery. The trams now passed down Hog Lane West, with the result that most of the houses had apartment cards in their fanlights. George had moved from The Nest into 168. He could get a larger house for the same rent. His house was exactly the same as their old home. It gave René a depressing idea that nothing had changed. George was fatter: Elsie thinner. They had four children.

George was in the same office, and, as he said, had flung away ambition: too many children to take risks, and after all there was nothing in the small firm now. The one or two connections you depended on might go bust any day. It needed enormous capital to stand the fluctuations of prices. He had got a rise by pretending to go and was quite content. He played bowls in the summer and bridge in the winter. And Elsie? What with the house and the mother she had plenty to do, plenty to do.

As René walked along the passage he felt uncannily certain that he would find his mother sitting by the fireplace knitting. And it was so. She raised her



## THRIGSBY

eyes and looked at him with timid anxiety, held out her cheek to be kissed, went on knitting, and said :

"Now sit down and give an account of yourself."

He edited his experiences, and she listened without interest. Most of his talk was of Kilner.

"Artists are very immoral men, aren't they?"

René shrugged.

"It depends," he said, "on what you mean by morality."

"There *are* rules," said she, "and commandments."

"My friend has rules," he replied, "rather good ones. He dislikes doing anything which interferes with his power to paint."

"To me that sounds very selfish."

"I don't think we can argue about that, mother."

"No. I suppose you made very little money."

"Three pounds a week."

"I suppose you could do with that, with only yourself to keep. Though it seems a pity, considering the amount of time and money spent on your education."

Was it his mother speaking? What had happened to her? Whence had come the dry hardness in her voice? Why were her eyes so dead? They used to steal quick little glances when she spoke. Now she only stared listlessly. A home-coming? This for a home? In the house next door there had been some stirring of life: the night when he had returned home from Scotland: the strange days after his father's restoration.

The windows of the room were shut. René felt stifled. He made some excuse and went away out of

## YOUNG EARNEST

the house, and roamed through the familiar streets. There were many houses empty: the gardens, some of which had once been trim, were now unkempt. The whole district was dismal and devitalized. Only the red trams clanging and clanking down the cobbled streets made any stir and gaiety.

He found himself presently in Galt's Park. The little pink brick houses had invaded it. Many of the big houses were pulled down: others were being demolished, and only jagged walls and gaping windows were left. On the site of the Brocks' house stood a little red-brick chapel outside which were announcements in Welsh and English. That gave him a shock. Some of the past life had been brushed away. He disliked the idea of its room being usurped by a chapel, a place of Christian worship. He did not know why he disliked this idea so much, but it was connected vaguely with the image of his mother sitting in that room, knitting and talking in an empty voice, and clinging obstinately to rules of conduct.

At the other end of Galt's Park he came on a new street, flung straight across what he remembered as fields. Following its dreary length, he found himself near the Smallmans' house. It was now completely shut in with little pink brick houses. He turned in at the gate, rang at the bell and asked the maid if he could see the Professor. He was left waiting in the hall where he had seen Linda's green parasol. Here, too, there was no change. The Professor came out looking very mysterious. He took a hat down, seized René by the arm and led him out into the street.

## THRIGSBY

"Well, well," he said. "I'm glad to see you, glad to see you. How are you?"

"Very well." René felt inclined to laugh. Clearly the Professor was trying not to hurt his feelings and to disguise the fact that he did not think him fit to enter his house, that temple of domesticity.

"Tell me about yourself. One doesn't lose interest, you know."

This time René did not edit his experiences.

"I had heard stories," said the Professor. "I was reluctant to believe them."

"Why?"

"Well—er— You know—one expects——"

"That every man will do his duty."

"It is hardly a subject for satire," said the Professor.

René exploded:

"Good God! What else is it a subject for? England expects? Does the whole duty of man consist in self-mutilation? Why, then, the noblest man is he who shirks every responsibility, let his mind rot and his feelings wither, so that he can attain a devilish efficiency at the job into which he tumbles before he has begun to develop enough to know what he can do. These are your successful men, your pundits, your Lord Mayors, your merchant princes, your politicians——"

"My dear Fourmy, I think you should recollect that you hardly gave yourself time to recognize what Thrigsby stands for, the greatest industrial center in the world."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I had time enough to realize what it has done for my father, my mother, my brother, and myself."

"Two wrongs do not make a right, and I do not think you set about remedying matters in the right way. You had every opportunity here. You had escaped the pressure of industrialism. You had good brains."

"Brains!" cried René. "I had escaped from industrialism only to talk about it."

"We are doing useful work. The defects of the system are slowly being recognized as a result of our investigations."

"Can't you realize them without investigation? Aren't they as plain as the nose on your face?"

"You can't find a remedy without investigation. That leads to mere sentimental socialism. But why need we quarrel about that? You didn't like the work. I hope you found more satisfaction in your vagabondage."

"London is just as bad, rather worse, because the wickedness of it all is glossed over with a kind of boastfulness. Here you either make money or you don't. There, as far as I can see, your only chance is to spend money: not that I saw much of that except from the outside; still I did see all sorts and kinds of people, and you can make rough conclusions about them."

"You don't mind my suggesting that you were hardly in a condition to make impartial observations?"

"We don't seem able to use the same terms. You still think I was a fool not to stay in my nice little



## THRIGSBY

home, with my nice little job and my nice little income."

"I don't judge you. I only say that if everybody were to do the same——"

"I only wish more people would. There'd soon be an end of congestion. I only came round to-night because I couldn't stand the sight of my brother settling down to his nice little home and my mother fast freezing into a nice old lady—and then I find you terrified lest I should enter and pollute your nice little home. I tell you, what I have seen to-day has settled me. I came up here in a muddle about it all, half feeling that I had made an ass of myself, but I'm absolutely certain now——"

"But a man must think of his wife and children, and, indeed, you are unjust. I have no fear of your disturbing my household. We should be only too glad to see you, only it happened, if you must know, that my wife was expecting Linda Brock. She uses her own name now."

René gave a shout of laughter.

"But I'd like to see her. How is she?"

"Her mother died six months ago and left her a great deal of money, a fortune. We had no idea she was so rich. Linda wrote some plays, you know. She has bought the theater and presented it to the Players. I am one of the trustees. Thrigsby is very proud of the theater——"

"It used to be music when I was young," said René, "and the orchestra was always in debt."

"Art," said the Professor, "cannot be expected to

## YOUNG EARNEST

pay for itself. We are running the theater to a certain extent in connection with the university——”

He had assumed the voice in which he lectured. René cut him short:

“I’d like to see Linda. Will you take me back with you.”

“I—er——”

“You needn’t thrust me on her. Just ask her if she’d like to see me, and come out and tell me: yes or no. After all, if it comes to that, we’re still married. I believe, by the brutal laws of the country, I could insist on seeing her whether she liked it or not. You might tell her that I have come into some money also.”

“Really? I’m so glad.”

“Hurrah!” cried René, “you think I’ll have to live up to it and settle down.”

“It would certainly be a splendid thing if——”

The Professor’s whole attitude toward him was changed. Already, it was clear, he was beginning to plan a grand scene of reconciliation, a reformed René, a forgiving Linda, the Smallman family in the background, symbolical of Impregnable Matrimony. René caught the hint and his mind played with it and blew it out into a grotesque. It gave him so much pleasure that he chuckled and said:

“It won’t do, you know. We couldn’t come together again without a scandal.”

The Professor was so intent on his own thoughts that he did not notice the savage irony of the remark. He said:

## THRIGSBY

"It would soon die down."

"Sooner than the other?"

"Well——!"

"I've got you there," observed René. "It wasn't fair though. I hadn't the slightest intention of doing any such thing."

"Why, then——?"

"Why do I want to see her? I don't know. I want to. Isn't that reason enough?"

They had returned to the house.

"You just ask her. Tell her I'm in Thrigsby for a few days and would like to see her. If she doesn't wish it, don't worry. I'll wait ten minutes."

"Very well," said the Professor, not altogether giving up hope, "I'll tell her, but the way you talk of it seems to me almost indecent."

He let himself in at the front door, and in ten minutes was out again.

"Very well," he said, "she will see you. . . . If you don't mind, my wife has gone up to her room."

"I wonder," thought René, "what they would make of Ann. They wouldn't mind my leaving her."

He felt rather nervous as he reached the threshold of the study, but stiffened himself for the plunge. The door opened and he found himself shaking Linda warmly by the hand and asking after her health, and explaining how he came to be in Thrigsby. Linda was noticeably plumper, rounder, and more solid. He could see no charm in her and thought her unsuitably dressed, tactlessly, provincially. On the whole, he

## YOUNG EARNEST

liked her. The handshake was firm, her eyes were frank.

"It was nice of you to come and see me," she said. "So much better to have no nonsense about it."

"If you like," said the Professor, "I—I—will——"  
Linda appealed to René.

"Oh, no. I've nothing to say. I only wanted to know that there was to be no nonsense between us. I'm very glad. I wish we could have arrived at that sooner, but I suppose that was impossible."

Linda smiled:

"You've changed, René. That would have been blasphemy to you a few years ago. You hated coming to your senses."

"I should think so," said the Professor.

"You're not going to stay in Thrigsby?" asked Linda.

"No. That's impossible, even if I wanted to. We should be crossing each other's tracks. Not that I should mind that, but—— Well, it wouldn't do, would it?"

"No. I prefer being without a husband. Really, for an active woman it seems to me to be the ideal condition. She has a status and no risk."

The Professor sat bolt upright:

"What *do* you mean, Linda?"

"I won't insist on the advantages if it shocks you, Phil. René understands me."

"Oh, yes," said René, "Linda means she can lose her head without any danger of getting married."

The Professor exploded:



## THRIGSBY

"I never heard of anything so—so abominable."

"But I did mean that," said Linda. "Women do lose their heads, you know, even when they are married. Ask Freda. Don't look so hurt. She and I were talking it over yesterday, and we agreed that the law was so horrid that all I could do was to disregard it. And if René is willing that is what I propose doing. You shall represent the world at large. You do represent its opinion. You know——"

"I do not."

Linda passed over the interruption:

"You are the world at large and I say to you: 'This man is no longer my husband.' No more than that should be necessary. You don't want any more than that, do you, René?"

"Even that seems to me a needless statement of fact, but perhaps I'm extreme."

The Professor rose and stood with his back to the fireplace: "All this," he said, "is extremely distasteful. You are making a mock of marriage."

Said René:

"We know more about it than you. We've tried disruption and you haven't. We're both the better for it. The fact is, there is no such thing as marriage. There are marriages, and precious few of them. Yours, no doubt, is one of the few."

The Professor was mollified, swallowed the harangue he had prepared, and sat down again.

René took Linda to her house in a remote suburb. She said:

## YOUNG EARNEST

"You know I quite dreaded meeting you again. I always had a feeling I should. The poor dear Professor was quite disappointed because we didn't make a scene."

"Oh, he didn't mind once we made it quite clear that we were casting no shadow of doubt upon the sanctity of his own domestic happiness. They're all like that."

"I'm sure he's quite convinced that you have become very wicked. Have you?"

"No. Strict monogamist."

"What do you mean by that?"

"One wife at a time."

Linda laughed at him. "You always were uncompromising."

Her laughter grated on René. He had a revulsion of feeling against her. She was, he realized, and always had been, cynical.

At her gate she held his hand for a long time, and asked him if he would not come and see her again.

"I think not," he said.

"I wish you would. We might be such friends. And you have become so interesting."

"I think not," he repeated. "Any friendship we might have would only be an——" He could not find the word and stopped rather foolishly. He could not move until he had found it. So they stood there hand in hand waiting in a ridiculous and empty silence.

"Would be what?" she asked in irritation.

He found the word.

## THRIGSBY

"An impertinence."

She shook his hand from hers almost angrily and walked away.

He knew then why he had come to Thrigsby. It was to make a clean cut with her. That achieved, there was nothing more in the grim city of his youth to keep him.

## VI

### THE COMFORT OF RELIGION

Quoi! Dieu me punirait éternellement de m'être livré à des passions qu'il m'a données?

THERE might be nothing to keep him, but yet he stayed five days longer. For one thing George's children were amusing and a profitable study. They had discovered that they had only to lie to their parents to keep them quiet, and, as lying was expected of them, and made things comfortable, they saw no harm in it. For the rest they did as they pleased and amused themselves. Little George was the very spit of his grandfather and a great spinner of yarns. René told him one morning to ask his mother if he could go out with him. Off trotted the boy, to return in a moment with a detailed account of the conversation he had had. It transpired subsequently that Elsie was out at the time. René told her. She said:

"I don't know what to do about the child. He has such an imagination."

"I prefer to call that invention. Imagination is the one quality in you that appreciates truth. I should begin if I were you by satisfying his curiosity. Tell him the truth about anything he wants to know."



## THE COMFORT OF RELIGION

"But he wants to know such awful things."

"What awful things?"

"Well, about me and George."

"It's hard to put a lie straight once you've told it. It is terribly easy to lose your respect for your parents."

"Oh, but little George loves us."

"How do you know?"

"He says so nearly every night."

"Oh, well," said René, "people believe only what they like to believe."

Elsie was rather ruffled:

"After all, they're our children."

"Certainly. You'll find out what they think of it soon enough."

It was interesting to watch the processes which went to make up the fool's paradise that George and Elsie, in common with their kind, called Home, the worship of lip-virtue, the constant practice of mean little subterfuges, George dodging Elsie's interest and suspicion of himself, she his of her, and the children, where necessary, contributing to the comedy and, for the rest, living thoroughly, selfishly, and callously in their own pursuits.

René found that as long as he would let George talk about bridge, bowls, and business, or splutter abuse of Radical legislation, and as long as he allowed Elsie to chatter of the neighbors and children and music-halls and clothes, they were both quite happy.

With his mother it was otherwise. She was uneasy in his presence and they could hardly talk at all, except

## YOUNG EARNEST

about their relations, the rich Fourmys, and the shabby tricks they had done; but after a while René became aware that they were holding a stealthy converse, an undercurrent to the words they used. He tried all sorts of devices to bring it to the surface but without success. His mother would relapse into silence or, without a word, would hurry off to her church and return impenetrably encased in humility, pale with emotional satiety. There was something abnormal about her then, something unnatural that made René's flesh creep. When it had passed he would feel once more the wildness in her that she kept so savagely repressed.

He recognized at last that he was staying on in the hope of penetrating her defenses. Having come to that, he attacked her one night when George and Elsie were out, and he knew there was no service at the church for her to escape to. Like the dutiful husband he was, George made a practice of taking Elsie to a music-hall once a week, a music-hall or two cinemas, as she chose.

Mrs. Fourmy had put down her knitting and said: "I think I would like a game of patience, René."

He put out the table and the cards and they played. He said:

"I wonder how you can stand seeing them play the old, old game."

"What old game?"

"Marriage. Killing each other in the first few weeks and then—humbug."

"George is a very good husband and father."

## THE COMFORT OF RELIGION

"He lives with a woman in his house and children come automatically."

"He is very good to Elsie."

"He placates her."

Mrs. Fourmy took out the ace of diamonds and covered it. René said:

"Do you ever think, mother, of how we used to say we'd go and live together?"

"Sometimes. I knew it was just nonsense."

Her eyes gave him a quick little affectionate glance, searching for affection. Ah! that was better.

"Not such nonsense, either. Why shouldn't you go and live in Aunt Janet's cottage? It was that I was thinking of, though I never thought it would be mine."

"I'd be so lonely."

"No lonelier than you are here."

"No."

That escaped her involuntarily. She covered it up.

"You're too old for that sort of talk, René. You're not a boy any longer."

"I'm much younger than I was then."

"Yes, that's true. Would you come too?"

"No. I—I'm going south again."

"Have you met—her?"

"Yes."

"I thought so." Her hands trembled. "Are you—are you going to live with her?"

"I hope so."

"It will be living in sin. I couldn't live in your house if I knew that——"

"You prefer George?"

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I—I—— Please don't talk about it any more, René."

"I must. You love me far more than you love George, and yet you prefer to accept a home from him rather than from me."

"Certain things are wrong, René."

"I take my chance of that."

"We aren't given any choice."

"Hell in this world or hell in the next."

"Don't speak lightly of such things, René."

"I saw my father in London."

Mrs. Fourmy let the cards trickle from her hands, and sat staring at him with weary, frightened eyes.

"You are your father over again."

"He told me. Then it was your love or your religion——"

"Don't, René, don't!"

He could not continue. He watched her living again in the agony of the memory, fighting with it, fighting it back, stifling the hunger in herself. He rose to leave her. She thought he was already gone, and slipped to her knees in an attitude of prayer.

René went to his room at the back of the house, the exact counterpart of his old den. He cursed that jealous God, that brutal invention of cowardice which has laid waste the western world. His rage only subsided when he came to think of Cathleen. He took paper and pen and wrote to her:

"I seem hardly at all different from the boy who used to write to you. It is almost exactly the same



## THE COMFORT OF RELIGION

room, the same hour, only now it is my brother and sister-in-law who occupy the big bed in the big front room. The window looks out at the same lighted windows opposite. And I am the same except that I know myself better and am more sure. What an extraordinary phantasmagoria between our parting and our meeting! How worthless and external adventures can be! How worthless and external the more intimate relationships! But without adventure, without mistakes, folly, suffering, how is that discovery to be made? I suppose my brother never could have made it, but he must have had, perhaps even now he has, his moments when his desire tugs against his little round of habits. He would call himself a happy man, and perhaps he is so. Perhaps we all get what we desire. That would be a comfortable creed, and I could believe it were it not for my mother. One is not born of a woman for nothing. Something binds. There is a deeper knowledge than that of the mind. There is in my mother a quality with which I feel at home, free. But she withholds it from me. I feel she hates it in me, as in herself, as in my father. Hard to find anything else in common between them. I told you that story of how she surrendered to him when he came back. It must have been that in her, taken unawares. It had lived without alarm for so long. It had been stirred in her when I came back from Scotland so full of that idiotic love for you—and after that, I can't follow. Too near to it perhaps, or perhaps it is obscured in me by all I have gone through since. But now she baffles me. She has suffered. Yes.

## YOUNG EARNEST

We all suffer, but suffering leads to discovery, to joy, or life is altogether barren. She suffers, she must suffer from living here in the dull house, but she takes her suffering and bottles it up, sterilizes it with religion. Her comfort! From the bottom of my heart I hate it. When she is full of what she calls her religion, then I can only bear with her by my inborn knowledge of her, and for that only the more do I detest the poison that has ruined her splendid life. And how it has been exploited, this voluptuous, selfish pleasure which they dare to call prayer and worship, this cowardly refusal to follow suffering whithersoever it leads. I cannot be tolerant about it. To thousands I know, it is no more than bridge or bowls to my brother George, a pastime. But with her, and with all who have a capacity for suffering, it is a passionate negation, and to have lived at all must be a horror. You see, I am almost inarticulate about it. I have tried to break through it and failed. She saw, and closed her eyes, as she must have seen time and again. The delight of seeing almost deliberately debased to fear. I wish I were more used to thinking about people, then I could make it more clear. But it doesn't seem much use, for I go on believing in them and liking them and expecting all sorts of things that never come. Oh, the freedom that I find with you, and the thought of you! Everything you understand, and all the differences between us we can just laugh at and use. I must take you to some place where we can build up a healthy life. Now that I have money, I thought for a time that we would

## THE COMFORT OF RELIGION

go and live in Scotland in my house. (How odd that looks. I really am pleased with my possessions for the first time.) That would not do. There must be work and activity. We'll have a brave time making plans to keep each other and everybody we know happy and keen. No more grubby humbugging, and no more Mitcham Mews. We'll find a way. . . ."

There came a tap at his door. He went to open it. His mother stood there.

"Aren't you going to bed, René? George and Elsie came home long ago."

"I was writing a letter."

"You shouldn't stay up, wasting the gas and all."

## VII

### CASEY'S VENTURE

*Fortis imaginatio venerat casum.*

CATHLEEN replied:

"I think you are hard on your mother. You love her too well to judge her, but you read yourself into her. You do that with me too, and I am sometimes alarmed when I think how I may disappoint you. But then I trust you so completely. You give so much that what you give turns at once into a gift from me to you, and that makes me give too. So it goes on like rain and cloud and river. Don't try to upset your little family. They won't like it. Keep all the upsetting for me. I love it and need it constantly."

He was very happy with this letter, carried it in his pocket and fingered it continually. Under its influence he ceased to chafe against his surroundings, and made no further attempt to force himself on his mother, and in her shy way she seemed to take pleasure in his exuberance.

The Edinburgh attorney sent an advance of £100. He posted £20 to Kilner, and besought him to leave Mitcham Mews and find a studio or go down into the country. Another twenty he sent to Lotta for Ann.



## CASEY'S VENTURE

He bought his mother an Indian shawl and provided Elsie with two dresses, tailor-made. The children were taken to a toy shop and allowed to select three treasures each. Little George hesitated for a long time between a helmet and a whip, and finally chose the latter because his small brother was no good as a soldier, but quite fair as a horse.

When René announced that he must go, George declared that they would "make an evening of it," and they played bridge until ten, and then in the parlor Mrs. Fourmy drew soft music from the old piano with its yellow keys. Under her hand the beauty of the Moonlight Sonata seemed faded, and René thought sadly that it was like the beauty of her life, faded and gone to dust. And as she played he took down the old family copy of Shakespeare, a vulgar edition spoiled with colored portraits of actors and actresses. He opened it at random and his eyes fell on these words:

Fear no more the heat o' the sun  
Nor the furious winter's rages:  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages:  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney sweepers, come to dust.

And tears came to his eyes, and he was filled with love and appreciation for these good kinsfolk of his who found such wealth in their little happiness and were so easily consoled in their little sorrows. And in the music it seemed that he and his mother could meet, had found a language which both could understand,

## YOUNG EARNEST

a song to unite passionate acceptance and passionate denial in the peace of the soul.

George said he never did think much of classical music, and asked Elsie to sing his favorite song: "Poppyland."

That done, they joined hands and sang "For Auld Lang Syne."

His mother came to see René in his bed. She said: "You won't come again."

"How do you know that?"

"I feel it. You've been very good and you have made me very happy."

"Then I'll come again."

"I don't want you to come again. You'll never be the same. George is always the same."

René remembered how his father had said she had done her best to keep them from ever being men.

"All right, mother. I wouldn't like it to be a pain for you to see me."

She smiled.

"It always is pain, René, dear, because I had to let you go."

He drew her down to him and kissed her. She said:

"An old woman like me."

He whispered:

"There'll always be some music that I can never hear without thinking of you."

"Yes," she said. "You were always the one to listen. And your father liked it too—some things."

"I'll think of that too."

## CASEY'S VENTURE

"Yes. Think kindly of your father. We both did try."

And she crept away. René called after her, but she did not hear him. He wished to keep her with him, to try to find some word that should comfort her. But he knew at once that the word would elude him, that there was nothing to say, that he and she were lost to each other, and must go their ways. All his efforts, all his hopes could wake no response in her. The mention of his father made him know how dearly she had loved the man, and he began to perceive the subtle force of love, how it can live in defiance of the will, and even through the failing of desire; how it uses even differences, even ruptures to bind and sustain; and how even the most selfish souls are knit with others, though it be to the destruction of every pleasant joy. He saw how little love needs consciousness, and how desperately men stand in need of it. Else are they consumed in love, and never for a moment do their lives take form and color before they sink to dust again, not wholly created before they are destroyed. Ideas of Kilner's came rushing back to René's mind, his description of his vision, the slow insistence on being given expression and form in paint, his own helplessness against the tyranny of what his eyes had seen and his imagination mastered. René began to understand that, to lose sense of time, to find in himself also a vision that had possessed him always. Only, unlike Kilner, he could not trace it back to any moment of ecstasy, any keen appreciation of some natural beauty, or the play of light. Light!

## YOUNG EARNEST

That was the creating idea. Kilner responded to the light of the sun, René to the light of the imagination, the light of the sun wrought upon by men's minds, so that their life also had its sun to bring fertility, and make the body a spirit and love an intellectual thing; the light of the sun stored through all the generations to dissipate the terrors of life and the power of death, to concentrate upon all beloved objects and show them in their loveliness as visions urging to creation. And in his love of woman man seeks no reflection of his light but the flash of hers, that her beauty may not perish.

René in his joy began to sing to himself. It was the song Cathleen had sung in the woods. He could see her again as she was there in the green haze of the woods, in the dappled light, mysterious and wild.

From that he deliberately turned away to fix his gaze on the humorous reality, because there was nothing that he did not desire to sweep into his joy. He lit a match and gazed round the little, cheaply furnished room, the ugly toilet service, the yellow dressing-table, the silly patterned wall-paper of pallid roses, the execrable pictures on the wall. His eyes were dazzled by the light, and they ached. Came darkness again, and he hummed to himself as he thought of the morrow and the train, with its wheels humming along the rails, taking him nearer the goal of his desire.

In the morning George shook him warmly by the hand when he came down, again as he was putting on his coat, and again, twice, as he set out for business.



## CASEY'S VENTURE

"Good luck," he said. "Good luck, old man. Elsie really has loved having you, and I'm sorry you're leaving dear, old, dirty Thrigsby."

"Good-by," said René. "I'll let you know what happens to me, if anything does. I don't think I shall stay in London."

"Good-by, then. By George, I shall be late!" And he set off at a run.

René only had ten minutes more. Most of that was taken up with seeing the children off to the kindergarten they attended. Mrs. Fourmy had stayed in her bed. He went up to see her. She clung to him, but spoke no word, and he was too deeply moved to speak. She looked old and frail and very small in her bed. At last she said:

"You're glad to go?"

"Yes."

Her eyes looked hunger and reproach. She turned her face away.

"Good-by."

"Good-by, mother. George is a good fellow, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes. And I find the children a great comfort." She said that in a perfectly toneless voice. The contrast between it and what she had looked only a moment before shocked René. He mastered himself and kissed her and hurried away.

Elsie said:

"It has been a treat. You really are a sight for sore eyes, René. I never thought you would grow into such a handsome man. I do wish George didn't

## YOUNG EARNEST

have to go to that office. It makes him so pasty."

"Let me know when you have a birthday," said René, "and you shall have another tailor-made."

"It's next week," said Elsie innocently.

"Right you are. You shall have it."

At last he was in the train. No sleep this time. Derby, Leicester, Nottingham, the hills by Elstree, London. A taxi took him hot speed to the hostel. Cathleen was not yet back from her work. Lotta met him with a grave face. She had had a terrible time with Ann, who had alternated between a dog-like gratitude to herself and harsh defiance of Cathleen and all the other young women of the hostel. The situation had been impossible. To appease her she was allowed to see his letter, and after a few hours' brooding on it—not without tears—she had demanded the twenty pounds. With that, apparently, she had cabled to Joe and Rita and another friend in Canada, had packed up her boxes, stolen away early in the morning, and got on board at Southampton, whither she had been traced.

"Poor little Ann," said René.

"I told you she had courage."

"She has that. To go out to a new life——"

"Our interference must have been intolerable to a spirit like hers. But what could we do? Even from you——"

"It is horrible that disasters should interfere with human comradeship."

"It is horrible, but they do interfere."

## CASEY'S VENTURE

"Does Cathleen know?"

"Yes. I told her last night."

"Well?"

"It seemed to bring home to her for the first time how terrible and ugly it was. You don't mind my saying that, but the past always does cast its shadow."

"Yes. It can be dispelled."

"Only with time."

"Yes."

Lotta said:

"I like the way you face things. There is no one like you for that—except Cathleen. . . . Where will you live now?"

"For the time being, with Kilner, I think."

"I found him a little studio in Hampstead. He is delighted and happy with it."

"I'll go there now, if you don't mind."

Lotta gave him the direction, and in a few minutes by Tube he was with Kilner, whom he found hard at work at a new Adam and Eve, squaring the composition on to the canvas.

"It's pouring money," said Kilner. "Your twenty pounds came one day and the next I heard that two drawings of mine had been sold, a head of Old Lunt and a half-length of Martin patting a horse's rump. . . . Casey's been up here every day asking for you."

"Casey? What does he want? Money? I'm not a millionaire."

"The poor devil has to leave London. It's eating up the little piece of his lung left by South Africa."

## YOUNG EARNEST

"That's bad."

"Seen anybody?"

"Only Miss Cleethorpe."

"She's a fine woman. I think I shall marry her. She's twenty years older than I am, but that is just about enough to bring a woman within reach of an artist."

"But——"

"Oh! she began it. We've already been down to her cottage in the country—I like that too. You'll have to fork out for a wedding present."

"I'll cancel your debts. But, are you really?"

"Fourmy," said Kilner, "you're an incorrigible romantic. I'm a realist, and like love's young dream to remain a dream. Life is a long, slow, dreary business, and I want a woman I can live with. . . ."

"Did you say that to Lotta?"

"Not in so many words, but in effect."

"Well, I'm——"

"You're not a bit glad. You're horrified. Common-sense is and always will be sordid to you. Lotta and I cooked chestnuts over a fire. We shall go on cooking chestnuts till we die. How's Ann?"

"Gone."

"I thought that would happen. You and I busted her between us—her pride, her joy in living, her rather slovenly habits of mind. You didn't know you were doing it. I did. I'm an awful swine. I told Lotta all about it—as we were cooking chestnuts. She refused to believe me."

There was a tap at the door, and Casey appeared.



## CASEY'S VENTURE

He rushed excitedly at René, and began to pour out an excited tale of how he had found the very thing, a livery yard at Rickham, thirty miles out of London to the northwest.

"Our station," said Kilner. "Lotta's and mine."

"It's a busy little town, but it needs brisking up, like you say, Mr. Fourmy; it needs motor-cars and a garage. That yard's the very thing, only a hundred yards from the station. There are people with cars living near, but they have to go five miles for repairs, and the trades-people can't have cars, because there is no one to look after them. It's *the* chance. I've got an option on the yard till next week. Will you take it up? I've got a map. See?"

He produced his map and showed the geographical advantages of Rickham. It had already good water and electric light. Its train service had been enormously improved, and it only needed the country round to be opened up. "Don't you see, Mr. Fourmy, it's your idea?"

René had half-forgotten it. Casey explained, and showed the ring of little country towns round London, how they had come to life again, as markets, as centers, and how in many of them factories were being built and all kinds of people were coming out from London to live in or near them.

Kilner was interested, and said to René:

"So you think that is how things are going to work themselves out? It's an attractive idea, the country for food, a ring of industrial centers, and the exchanges in the middle of it all. Some sort of shape

## YOUNG EARNEST

and design instead of the muddle we're in. It might even make room for the artist."

Casey said:

"When I heard you'd come in for some money I couldn't rest until I'd found what I wanted, and there it is. Will you come in?"

"I'll go down and look at it," said René. "I'm quite certain I can't live in your Thrigsby or your Londons any more, and I couldn't live in the country without doing the work of the country."

"Can't see you as a farmer," said Kilner.

René promised to go with Casey the next day.

He was enchanted with Rickham and with the yard. It had a small Georgian house attached to it, and the stables were built round a quadrangle with a gallery leading to rooms above them. Through the stables was a walled garden, and beyond that again a bowling green by the edge of a stream. The whole was freehold and wonderfully cheap. Rickham apparently was not yet awake to its glorious future in the English democracy in spite of its two cinemas, and the strong Liberalism of its opinions. It had one church and fifteen chapels, a Salvation Army barracks, and a public house every twenty yards. On the hill behind it villas were being erected, and along the valley little houses were being built for workpeople. On either side of the river just outside the old town the tall chimneys of factories were rising by the steel skeletons of new workshops. Clearly there was some truth in what Casey said. They undertook to buy

## CASEY'S VENTURE

the stables and walked into a lawyer's office to give instructions.

So certain had Casey been that René would come in with him that he had already engaged mechanics in London, and written up to various firms to apply for agencies. They were bombarded with applications from the local builders to carry out the necessary alterations, and on the advice of their solicitor arranged a contract. Before any work was begun Casey insisted on having an illuminated sign, "Garage," fixed above the gate, and below it, the name of the firm, "Casey & Fourmy."

"Looks like business, that," he said, as they stood in the street and surveyed it with satisfaction. "Give the town something to talk about. No advertisement like talk."

## VIII

### THRIVING

"Were you married in a church, Ursula?"

"We were not, brother: none but gorgios, cripples, and lubbenys are ever married in a church: we took each other's words."

**M**EANWHILE his relations with Cathleen remained in abeyance. What she had accepted in the excitement of events, she needed to reconcile with her calmer thoughts. That was not so easy. She was brought to doubt of herself. She had been more hurt than she had realized, and she feared she was too weak for the suffering that filled her. For many weeks it was a pain to her to see René, for she could not but remember the destruction and misery he had brought into other lives. She had no support, for her rupture with her family had made an end of the ideas in which she had been instructed as a child, and she had no experience to draw upon, and Lotta's theories, when it came to cold practice, vanished into the air. She could not avoid jealousy of the past; and, with that in her, she could not bring herself to take the plunge into a life so different from any she had ever imagined. René was so patient, and had



## THRIVING

flung himself with such ardor into his new work, that she had begun to tell herself that he had no need of her, that she too was in a sense his victim, since his meeting with her had enabled him to break with the past only to thrust the weight of it upon her. The superficiality of her conceptions was betrayed and made plain to her, broken up by one fixed idea, the thought of Ann's child. How could he have let that go? How could he thrust that back into the past? How could his feeling for herself have broken clear of that? And Ann? How could she set thousands of miles between herself and him? If she had stayed, they could have wrestled with the reality. They could have made provision in their lives for the inimical new life. But Ann, in her desperation, had left them to deal only with an idea, a shadow, a memory. René apparently could ignore it. He was full of enthusiasm and happiness. He seemed to consider Ann's flight as a declaration of independence and to acquiesce in it. Had he felt nothing at all? Could a man come in contact with that mystery and remain unmoved? Must not such defiance of Nature be fraught with appalling consequences, to end in the worst state of all, indifference?

She hugged her difficulties to herself, and dared speak of them to no one, for she was possessed by the shyness bred by a fixed idea. At last Lotta caught her out in deliberate avoidance of René and asked what had come to her. Little by little she dragged her trouble out of her, and tried to reassure her and bring her to reason.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"You should ask him about it," she said. "He must have thought it out. He did not forget her. You must remember that. It was not a case of his feeling for you wiping her out of his mind. My own view is that Nature is entirely indifferent, and I don't believe parents and children do naturally and inevitably have any feeling for each other. Indeed, Nature is so indifferent that our thoughts about it are rather impertinent. It is obvious that children do not always bind men and women, and I imagine they must often have the contrary effect; always, I should say, when they have for each other only the kind of selfish affection which resents any intrusion. Surely that is why so many women turn from their husbands to their children——"

The word "intrusion" brought Cathleen to the crux of her difficulty. She saw, with some exaggeration, that this was her condition, and the quality of her affection, that she had been hungering for possession of her lover with no intrusion from the past.

"O Lotta," she said, "we are fools to set our faces against what cannot be altered. I thought I had broken away from narrow conventions, but I had only rid myself of the names of things, not of the things themselves, the silly pretense that people wake for a moment out of a sleep in which nothing can happen, love and go to sleep again. We are stupid, trying to keep all our loves separate. We can't do anything but stumble from one love to another, can we?"

"It is what all of us do, and Nature has to take her chance. It is degrading to have one's folly and weak-

## THRIVING

ness, even one's mistakes, used by Nature, but that is the way of the world, and I think a real love can always get the better of it."

"I have tried so hard."

"You should see it from his point of view. Suppose it was you who had been trapped by Nature's indifference. You would feel hardly used if he let jealousy stand between you and him."

"But René couldn't."

"Perhaps. Why should *you*? It really does hurt me to see you two wasting time and youth, two absolutely free people in a world that takes its greatest pride in its waste of opportunity. You are behaving abominably. Really, if you let him be much longer he will settle down with Mr. Casey, and discover that he can do at any rate comfortably without you, and keep you as an ideal. That happened to me when I was a girl. I let things slip by until I woke up one fine day to find that I was nothing but an ideal and had no hope of ever becoming anything else, even though I had married him. So I never did. Love changes, like everything else. It grows in us and dies. Very short is the time when it can be taken and built into our lives. If that time be let slip away then love dies down. If that happens, then life can never be anything more than amusing."

"If it should be too late?" said Cathleen, alarmed.

"It won't be," replied Lotta; "he has been to me and I said I would send you down to him."

At the week-end Cathleen went to Rickham. She found René in overalls taking down the back axle of a

## YOUNG EARNEST

car. His face and hands and hair were smeared with grease.

"Hullo!" he said.

And Cathleen answered:

"I hope I'm not in the way."

"All right. Only stand clear of the machine. There never was such ubiquitous stuff as motor grease. I shan't be long. It's a broken crown-wheel, I think—Oh! here's Casey. Casey, take Miss Bentley round the garden. Have tea in the parlor, and I'll join you when I've cleaned up."

It was a couple of hours before René joined them. During that time Cathleen had to listen to his praises, and to hear how the business, after a slow beginning, had begun to pick up, until now they had almost as much work as they could do with their present staff.

"I'm sorry," said René. "It's a new customer, and he wants the car for to-morrow morning, and I couldn't take any of the men off their jobs. It is good to see you. Have you seen the house?"

No. Casey had only shown her the garden.

After tea René took her over the house.

"It wants you," he said.

"I knew that. I sent in my resignation yesterday."

"When will you come?"

"In a month's time."

"Forever and ever?"

"It feels like that now."

"Yes. There doesn't seem to have been anything but you and I. You're a little slip of a woman to fill



## THRIVING

the whole world." And he lifted her clean off her feet. She lay back in his arms and her eyes closed, and he could feel her whole body surrender to his strength, her whole spirit come out to meet his in love.

## IX

### YOUNG LOVE DREAMING

EVERY year they visited Scotland and brought new stores of happiness to the dell where they had first discovered it. Always, René declared, through their joy there ran the song of the burn, and the wind in the trees, the beauty that had first awakened him. They made high holiday. Cathleen liked to stroll about the woods or lie in them with a book (she could hardly get him to read at all). He loved to wander over the moors alone or to go striding over the hills, and to come back to her in the evening. When they spent their days apart they would meet in the dell, and, as of old time, he would make a couch of bracken for her. And he would lie by her side and rejoice in her beauty, fondle her, praise her, tease her.

"I don't believe," he would say, "we shall ever be old."

"Not when you look at the children" (they had three) "and see how they grow?"

"Least of all then. I watch them and discover new worlds in them, and often through them I discover new wonders in you."

"Don't you know me by this time?"

"Every day I find you more astonishing and strange.

## YOUNG LOVE DREAMING

Sometimes I come into your room in the morning and watch you sleeping, and I feel very lonely then. You are so remote. It is like waiting for the dawn. Then I see consciousness waking in you. Then your eyes open and you gaze innocently out upon the world. And you see me and are satisfied."

"And you?"

"I know that another day has come, another opportunity, a new turn in the adventure."

"Is it always an adventure?"

"Always. Unending desire."

"For me," she said, "it is peace and knowledge. It would be stifling if I had not you to kindle them."

René kissed her and laughed:

"The whole duty of man," he said, "to keep the flame alight in woman."

She became serious on that.

"It's true, René. You nearly let me wither away, and my life dwindle to ashes. I am often sick with fear when I think of it, how near I came to being one of your failures."

On such evenings they would talk until darkness crept into the woods, and they woke to their mysterious night life when their sweetest songs are sung, and they are filled with magic snares and lurking dangers and conflicts. Sweet comfort was it to be together then amid so much menace and alien power, and they would go warily hand in hand until they came within sight of the lights of the great house. Then they would almost run until they reached the open lawn where the free air would beat upon their faces.

## YOUNG EARNEST

"I always feel," René said once, "as though we had had a narrow escape."

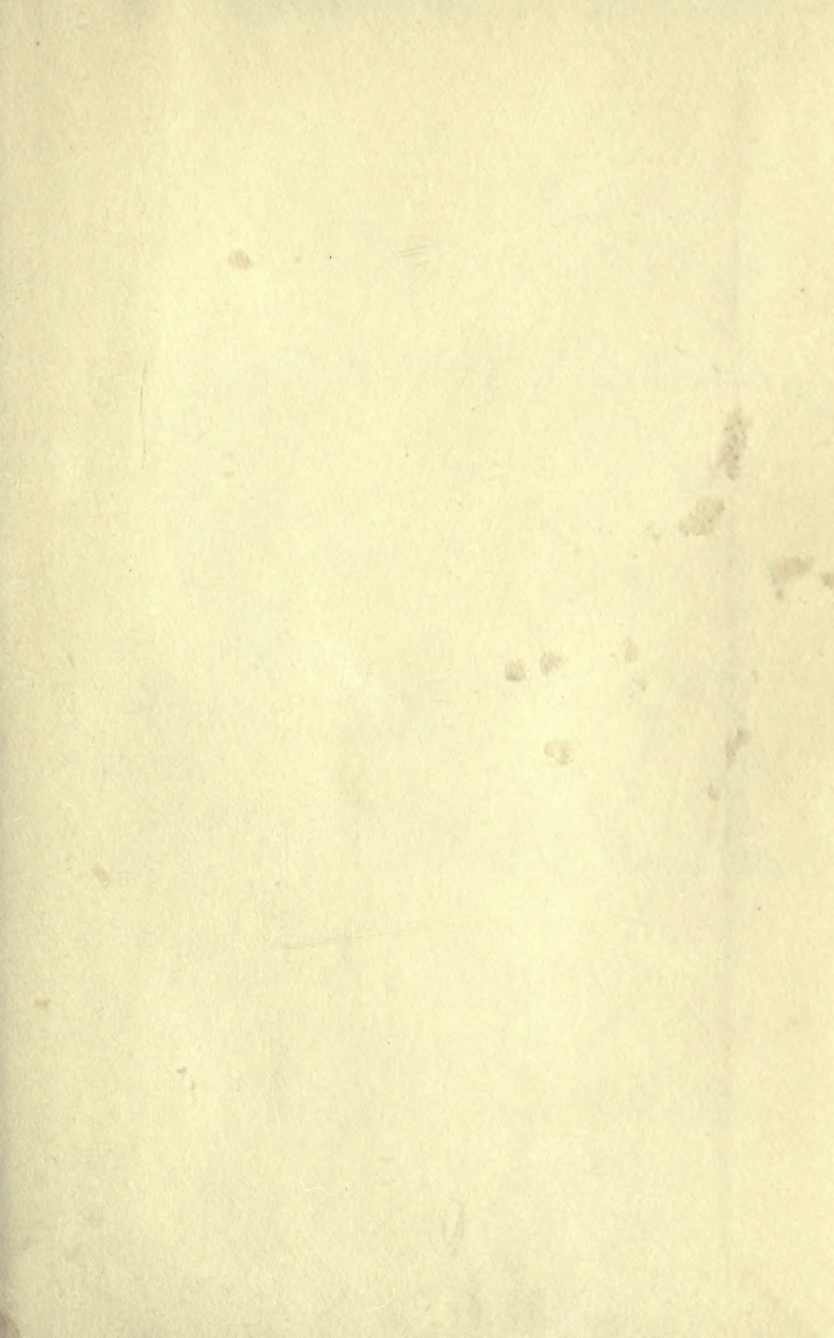
"In the woods, do you mean, or in life?"

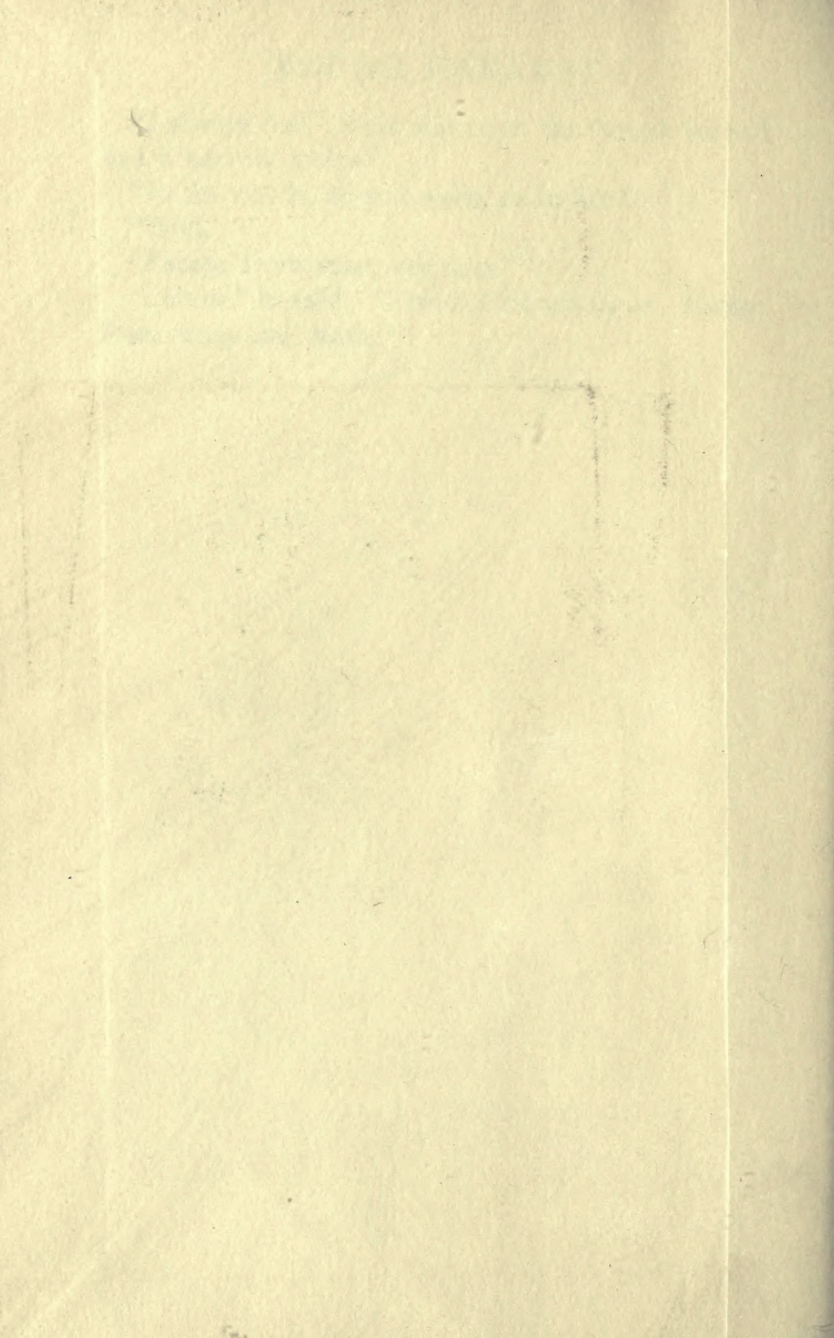
"Both."

"Escape from what, my dear?"

"I know," he said. "This is the truth of us. Escape from sleep and death."







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NAME OF BORROWER.

Henry

W. C.

W. C.

W. C. (God)



